

Osanaajimi
Oryou
幼馴じみ
三 おごもり

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異世界の
迷宮都市で

治癒魔法使い
やってます

I Work As A Healer In Another World's Labyrinth City

vol.1

by Osananajimi

[Novel Updates](#)

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ルルカ

「ええー、大丈夫だよー、
バレたりしないって」

「ほらぁ、少しだけなら
触ってもいいんだよー?」





★ジャイアントアント★

……あれは、
俺の……足？

「……それは、あなたには
関係ないでしょう」

目を伏せ、
視線を逸らすエリス。

✧ エリス ✧





















Chapter 1: Becoming Jobless

Labyrinth City Merhatz.

At the edge of this city that spreads out from the labyrinth that lies at its center, I'm working hard as usual at Eris' hospital.

"Uwah, you didn't treat this wound properly, did you? It's starting to fester. You'll need Dis-Poison for this too. Along with the Heal, that comes to 400 Zeni."

Before my eyes is a girl with vivid red hair, long enough to reach her shoulders. She has a rough style, with moderately-toned limbs, a simple buttoned shirt, and shorts. There's a boyish air to her.

On that girl's left arm there's a wound from being caught on something sharp. However, contrary to the painful-looking scar, the girl's reply is cheerful, and she shows no sign of being especially bothered by the wound. Yes, for this girl, wounds like that are an everyday occurrence. Because this girl is an "adventurer".

When I cast "healing magic" on the girl's arm, a faint light gathers on the affected part, and the wound mends.

"Ehh, 400 huhhh. Shiki, can't you lower that just a liiiittle more? My equipment broke too on that last exploration, so I'm low on moneyyy."

"That's impossible. If I lower the treatment fee on my own, Eris is gonna fire me for sure this time. I'm in a tough spot as a hired healer."

I, Satou Shiki, was originally a college student from modern-day Japan. Then one day, all of a sudden, I came to this world. I was stabbed with a kitchen knife by a slasher, and the moment I thought I had died, somehow I was here in this labyrinth city.

Originally, I had earned a modest sum of money in Japan as a counterfeit antiques dealer, and a much greater sum of money by building up a psychic healing group as a new religion. And I don't know whether it's related to that or not, but I acquired Appraisal and Healing Magic skills upon my arrival in this

world. And then, in order to make a living in this other world, after various twists and turns I began to work at Eris' hospital. It's been three months or so since then.

"Ehhhh, it's fiiine, she won't find out. C'mon, just the Dis-Poison amount! I'm begging youuu."

Squish.

The red-headed girl squeezes her freshly-healed arms together. You wouldn't guess it from her boyish demeanor, but she's pushing up some large tits.

This is dangerous. In many ways.

Without her labyrinth exploration gear, the only thing covering the girl's breasts is that single shirt. Of course she's wearing underwear, but the underclothes in this world don't have anything so unromantic as fixed support wires. Unimpeded by the thin garment, her abundant twin peaks jiggle and sway.

"B-But you see..."

The manager of this hospital, Eris.

Soon after I came to this world, I was looking for a job. I ran into her by chance on the street, and I was charmed by those giant tits that were crammed into her monastic habit and looked ready to burst free. With a teensy bit of stalking I followed her to this hospital. And that's how I started working here.

However, to be honest, the environment isn't great. First of all, maybe because of its location far from the labyrinth at the center of town, there aren't many customers. Since customers don't come, the place's treatment fee is set impossibly low to attract customers from elsewhere. Of course, thanks to that management style the hospital has no money, and accordingly, my salary is low too. Although I'm a live-in worker, so I don't really care that much either way about the salary.

If I give discounts at a hospital managed like this, what will Eris say? No, actually she scolds me, and even tells me the next time I do it I'm fired. And that's happened countless times already.

But man, the only type of adventurers that would go out of their way to a hospital so far from the labyrinth are money-grubbers and sly old dogs.

"Looook, it's fine if you wanna touch 'em just a liiiittle...? "

Faced with the negotiation skills of exceptional women, I resist in vain, and I get forced into giving them discounts every time. It's all god's fault for bearing forth such sinful fruits. Ah, since I was revered like a god by parts of Japan as the founder of a new religion, you could argue that it's my fault too though.

"I gueesssss there's no helping it. Alright, 200 Zeni for the Heal portion!"

"Waaah, thank you! Well then, just a little, 'kay?"

The red-headed girl sticks out her chest, pushing out those big twin peaks. When I stare intently at her face, her cheeks blush slightly and she quickly turns her head to the side.

This. This is it. That devilish behavior that makes men dance on the palm of her hand. Her soft, seductive voice. This girl is like this every time. I just need to see this kind of thing once and the price discount is already a done deal. It's not that I'm weak-willed; this girl's ability is incredible.

Then, when I reach out my hand to the girl's chest—

"*What* are you doing?"



An absolute-zero voice.

It reverberates throughout the treatment room.

"Wh-, ah, I'm on my way out. Thank you very much for the treatmeeeeent!"

Ahhh. Boyish-chan dashed off. That's an adventurer for you. What a magnificent body. I didn't even get to rub it yet. Wait, she didn't pay the fee either! Pay up.

The reason she ran away goes without saying.

At the entrance to the treatment room, striking a daunting pose, there's a woman with waist-length blonde hair, Eris. 18 years old, she's a girl with a bit of a harsh personality who runs this hospital by herself. Her arms are crossed, pushing up some plump, voluptuous breasts that completely overshadow the earlier Boyish-chan's, and the glare she's pointing at me is sharp enough to stab me to death.

"Ah...hahahaha."

Secret to success #1: When you're in trouble, go with laughter.

"I told you, didn't I? I told you not to reduce the treatment fee. Over, and over, and over, and over."

No effect.

"L-Look, that was, y'know, *that*

. Ah, her chest! It seems her chest was injured, so I had to treat it, didn't I? Okay?"

Secret to success #2: I had a valid reason for it.

"And why would physical contact be necessary, just to cast healing magic? Besides, I was watching from the start."

No effect.

"P-P-Please find it in your heart to forgive meeeeeee!!"

Secret to success #3: Prostration.

An enthusiastic, perfect-form [dogeza](#). Put your head against the floor, and just earnestly beg for forgiveness. With this display of wretchedness, surely even

the furious Eris can't help but to forgive me.

"...Even though I hired you when you told me wanted to work here no matter what, you never listen no matter how many times I say it. Any opportunity you get, whether it's me or the customers, it's just sexual harassment, sexual harassment, sexual harassment. And despite that you eat enough for two people. I've been putting up with it until now only because your healing magic skill was so incredible, but. I. have. had. enough. You are fired. Never show your face here again."

Yep, it was useless. Three outs. I've made her mad plenty of times before, but never this angry. At least she's never said anything about showing my face and all before.

"S-Sorry, look, I won't do it anymore. If you get so angry it'll spoil your pretty face, yeah?"

"Tch!!"

Ah, this is bad.

Eris-san is truly angry. Instantly clicking her tongue, looking at me like rotten waste, I can feel her true disgust pointed at me. Her bluntness is scary. Considerably scary. The only time I've ever seen her this scary before was yesterday when I inevitably ended up seeing her swimming nude and on top of that my foot inevitably slipped and I inevitably fell over onto her and inevitably ended up rubbing her breasts a little. Okay yeah, that was going overboard.

I seriously just got fired 5 seconds ago.

My next words will surely decide my fate from now on. Get moving, brain. Think. Find the words that will bring me back from the dead.

With all my brainpower, I search for the loving phrase that will make Eris go "So dreamy, take me! as her cheeks blush out of delight and shyness.

"Here's your luggage. I've already packed it."

Time's up.

Eris tosses a large jute bag my way. When I look inside, there are a few men's habits and a single bank card. Yep, these are my things. She's quite thoroughly

prepared.

"Um, Eris-san?"

"Just like I told you. You're fired. Get out."

—And that's how I was thrown out of Eris' hospital on the spot, and became homeless and jobless in another world.

Chapter 2: Buying a Slave

Having been kicked out of Eris' hospital and now officially homeless, I'm at a loss. Eris is unyielding, and hanging around at the hospital entrance making an unsightly scene like a petulant child hasn't changed her mind.

"What do I do now..."

My present concern is my future living expenses. The money I've deposited at the bank amounts to three months' salary at Eris' hospital. The sum total is 60,000 Zeni. Considering the prices of commodities in this world, that's equivalent to about 600,000 Japanese yen?

By the way, that's not much compared to the median salary. Generally, employing a healer at a hospital requires about 50,000 Zeni a month. And, I may be saying this myself, but my healing magic ability is outstanding for this world.

I realized this after I came here, but even on Earth where mana almost doesn't exist, I seemed to be able to use a minor amount of healing magic already. That's precisely why I was elevated to the position of the founder of a new religion. What happened when I, who was able to use healing magic from the beginning despite having basically no mana, came to this world that's overflowing with mana? My mana-starved body greedily absorbed mana from my surroundings, and as a result came to store an incomprehensibly enormous amount of it. I'm able to make efficient use of healing magic thanks to my understanding of the human body based on modern knowledge, and as the founder of a new religion in Japan who garnered faith like a living god, I had an exceedingly high affinity with this world's healing magic which "originates from the power of faith".

Well, that's all well and good, but right now I need to focus on the matter of my living expenses. At an average inn with no bath — Eris' hospital didn't have a bath either, though — a single night's stay costs around 500 Zeni. A solid meal is 100 Zeni, or thereabouts. In brief, one day of living with three square meals and a roof over my head costs about 800 Zeni. Which means that with my current savings, after 75 days I'll be flat broke. This is exceedingly unpleasant.

Even if I try to work at a different hospital, there aren't many places that would hire an otherworlder like me; a suspicious character who has never studied at any church. In that respect, Eris, who took me in when I had just arrived from another world, was a kind and deep-bosomed person. Although maybe she just saw my talent for healing magic and caught the whiff of money.

If I use my talent with healing magic to appeal to them then perhaps I'll be picked up somewhere, but standing out too much wouldn't be good either. As a healer with ability the likes of which has never been seen before, if I handle it poorly, some health-maniac aristocrat or whatever may conscript me against my will and keep me under house arrest. I have no power to resist something like that, and authority is a terrifying thing. I want to try my hardest not to get involved with it. Also, since this is another world and all, if at all possible I want to make a harem.

"Ah, it's Shiki. Whatcha doing here at this time of day?"

As I'm having an early lunch at the tavern near the center of town that's a popular hangout, the red-headed Boyish-chan from earlier calls out to me. Saying "D'ya mind?" she takes a seat next to me and orders.

"I got fired from the hospital, so I'm stress eating."

I give her a sullen glare. Oh yeah, I gave her a discount but in the end I didn't get to touch her boobs. Actually, she never even paid. Lemme rub em. Not like I can say that in a place like this though. Given that it's a popular tavern, we have plenty of gruff-looking company around us. The second I groped a beautiful girl's chest in here, I'd be surprised if these ruffians didn't step in. I basically have zero combat ability. All I can do is heal. That's why I don't want to cause any trouble in a place like this.

"A-Ahaha. My condolences."

Boyish-chan awkwardly averts her eyes. She must be self-conscious about shouldering part of the responsibility for my firing. Well, since Eris was so thoroughly prepared this time, the various things I did while peeping in on her swimming yesterday were likely the primary reason she was pushed past the limits of her patience, though.

"Oh yeah, I didn't catch your name?"

I've met Boyish-chan a number of times over the past 3 months, but I don't remember her ever introducing herself. I'm not sure how she even knows my name.

"Na-, e-ehhhh!! After I let you do all those things you don't even remember my name!? Haven't we known each other for three months!? Eh, y-you really don't remember it!?"

"D-Don't say something that might be misinterpreted, you're gonna cause a scene. Besides, we haven't interacted outside of giving medical treatment on a handful of days."

"...I guess you're right, huhhh.

...Ruruka, I'm Ruruka. Remember that, 'kay?"

Is it that vexing for me not to remember her name? She's sulking.

"Yeah, I won't forget."

Since you're the devilish character who's partly responsible for me getting fired. Really, what am I gonna do from now on? No matter how much cheap liquor I drink, no good ideas are coming to me. Sigh.

"Whaaat? You just sighed."

"I'm just wondering what I'm gonna do now that I'm out of a job."

"Hmmm, why not try becoming an adventurer or something?"

"Adventurer, huh. I can't use anything but healing magic, you know?"

"Yeah, I think that's asking too much if you're on your own, but won't it work out if you form a party? I'm pretty sure there's a demand for healers? If I didn't have my own party I'd go with you, y'know."

"Is there no way I could join your party?"

"Ahaha, my party has a pretty uptight girl in it, so..."

A girls-only party, huh? I really want to join, though. And given that Ruruka is often showing up at the hospital, she probably doesn't have a healer. Is it no good? If I were Ruruka there's no way I would introduce a habitual sexual harasser to my friends, especially if they're girls.

"Hmmm, won't it be hard for a newbie adventurer to find partners? I'm not proud of this, but I don't exactly have many friends or acquaintances."

In the first place it's only been 3 months since I came to this world. I don't have anyone I can depend on.

"Wah, that looks yummy! Well, I'm sure it'll work out, good luuuck."

How careless. Looks like her attention has shifted to the food that was just delivered. I can't expect anything out of her anymore.

Sigh, what am I going to do from now on?

I finish my meal and aimlessly wander around, at which point I come across a side street off of the main street where a crowd has gathered.

In the middle of it there are men and women wearing thin sheets of cloth lined up in a row.

It's a slave market. There are slaves in this world. Because they committed crimes, or they ran up debt, or they wanted to go on living even if they had to give up their freedom. There are various reasons for becoming a slave, but they're basically handled the same way. The master guarantees the slave's bare necessities. The slave unconditionally obeys the master's orders. If they don't, a magical seal known as a slave crest activates, forcing them to comply.

That's it, how about I become an adventurer by forming a slave party? If it's a slave, I don't have to worry about being backstabbed inside the labyrinth, and I can take all the earnings. The question of whether I can trust my partner is hugely important as a healer who has almost no combat potential. I just might have hit upon a great idea.

I take a look, and there are various races. Every one of them is wearing a single filthy sheet like a poncho, but there are dog ears and elf ears, and their ages range anywhere from 10ish up to 40ish. But man, they're all expensive. Even the cheapest 40-something human auntie is 200,000 Zeni. An elf slave that's good-looking, and moreover has combat experience as a wizard, is over 4 million Zeni. You could build a house with that kind of money.

The amount of Zeni in my possession is 60 thousand and change. No matter how I look at it, I can't afford one.

I'm reluctant, but I should give up. There's nothing I can do if I don't have the means. But the second I decide to turn around and go find an inn for the night, a 50,000 Zeni price tag enters my field of view.

Over there is a young girl of about 12 years. The first thing that catches my attention is her face. There's a huge wound on it like she got caught by a monster or something, and with the exception of her mouth it's all ruined. Looks like she's completely lost her sight in both eyes. The color of her skin is a pale brown, about the shade of a tan? Her hair is a dull gray, and an elf ear is poking out from the side of it. Only one side. Perhaps she can't eat very well, but her figure is too thin. I get the impression that if I leave this dark elf girl alone, she'll die.

Just from a quick inspection, she's missing both eyes, her nose, and one of her ears. It'd probably take quite a pile of money to heal them. To heal missing body parts, especially eyes, requires bishop-or archbishop-class healing magic from the church. Even if she doesn't get healed, a slave that can't see wouldn't be very useful, and I'm not sure anyone would want her as a pet either since her face is all smashed up. It makes me wonder why she's even up for sale.

I activate Appraisal, and find something very interesting in her status.

Name: Yuel
Race: Dark Elf
Possessed Skills: Dagger Arts

She has a Dagger Arts skill.

A skill holder. Skills vary widely, but the highest-grade ones guarantee you enough ability to take on several lowest-class monsters at the same time, that's how skills work in this world. She might not have much power since she's still a child, but dark elves are a nimble race. I bet she could get by with a fighting style that makes use of her agile movements to dance around her opponents.

"Hey man, I want that dark elf kid over there."

"That dark elf? Errr, Yuel, I think it was. That one's eyes are totally shot, you okay with that?"

"Yeah."

"Really! Oh boy, am I glad to sell that one. Thought I was gonna have to dispose of it. That'll be 50,000 Zeni, so how would you like to pay?"

"By bank card."

I place my bank card over the slave merchant's. Then I visualize a 50,000 Zeni payment. Bank cards, magic items that can transfer money according to the owner's wishes, are used by most people. They enable to you deposit and withdraw funds freely, like electronic currency where you can make transactions with nothing but a card.

"Yes, certainly."

The slave merchant retrieves the dark elf. Is her gait unsteady because she can't see out of her eyes, or else because she's malnourished? Maybe a little of both?

The slave merchant takes the magic-imbued seal he's carrying, sprinkles a drop of my blood onto it, and lightly presses it against Yuel's shoulder.

"With this, the slave contract is complete. Please be advised that we do not accept returns."

The slave merchant leaves Yuel behind and quickly takes off. It sounded like he meant that all she can do is sit around and eat with no hope of being sold, so I better not change my mind.

"I am known as Yuel. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

The dark elf girl introduces herself facing in the wrong direction. Looks like she really can't see.

"Yeah, how do you do. I'm Shiki. First off, why don't we go to an inn?"

For 2000 Zeni I buy her one set each of female undergarments and used clothes, plus some cheap shoes, then we enter a luxury inn that has a bath in each room.

Rooms with attached baths are often used for *that*

sort of purpose. If it's a couple, well, that's usually the goal. And I'm bringing along a not-very-aged girl with a smashed face. No matter how you look at it, I can only be seen as a dangerous man with unique tastes, and furthermore

rather extreme ones. That's a misunderstanding.

Enduring the gaze of the Onee-san, I fork over the high price of 2000 Zeni for one night and two meals, and we enter the room. I don't have the money for double or twin or anything, so of course it's a single room. First, I need to get off all the dirt and filth that's clinging to her.

"We're gonna take a bath first. Okay?"

"Yes, thank you very much for purchasing me. I have no experience, but I will do my best to service Master adequately."

Incidentally, this is the first thing she's said since her self-introduction. She was completely silent on the way to the inn. Though that might've been unavoidable since she couldn't see what was going on around her and had no idea what I was up to either.

Even so, that proposal just now was dangerous. If you ask me what I prefer, I like big boobs, and I'm no lolicon, but her earlier words sent a shiver down my spine. I wonder if this feeling is immorality? For a second I thought I was gonna smirk like a corrupt nobleman.

Be cool. Stay calm.

Even with my tiny, opportunistic conscience, I would definitely feel guilty for doing something to a kid of this age. Besides, I can't get excited with those horrible wounds on her face. Or rather, I don't have a taste for lolis in the first place.

"N-No, your treatment comes first."

"Treatment, is it?"

Whether she's surprised or bewildered, I can't read her expression. Although it might be more accurate to say that rather than it being unreadable, she doesn't have one in the first place. Yeah, I should really get around to healing her.

"Yeah, don't open your eyes right away. EX Heal."

I feel my mana rapidly flow out. EX Heal is the highest-ranked spell of single-target recovery magic. As you might expect for EX Heal, I can actually feel my

mana decreasing. And, right before my eyes, Yuel's eyes, nose, and ear rapidly regenerate.

"Eh? Ah, eh? Uahhh!"

"Ahhhhh, didn't I tell you not to open your eyes? You won't be able to see for a while, so keep them closed and wait right there. I'll come back once I get our meals."

Leaving Yuel behind temporarily, I grab some sandwiches at the dining hall on the first floor. Oh hey, they're free. That's a high-class inn for you. Well, this place's rates are high enough to cover sandwiches for dozens of people, though.

When I return to the room, Yuel isn't there. Eh, no way, did she run away?

No wait, I can hear a sobbing voice from the direction of the dressing room.

She didn't run away. Thank goodness. If the young girl was spotted running off by that front-desk Onee-san, I can't imagine the look I would get the next time we met.

When I check the dressing room, Yuel is there, standing in front of the mirror and skillfully patting her face over and over as she looks into the mirror, sobbing.

"My eyes... are there... my nose, my ears are there... uwahhhh"

"Oh, looks like you can see already. C'mere, I got some food."

"Nh, that voice, a-are you my Master?"

"The very same, ain't I handsome?"

In a flash, Yuel embraces me.

"Yes, so very cool. Cooler than anyone I've ever seen!"

S-Sure. How do I react to a reply like that? Or was it because she's my slave?

"T-Thank you very much. You... healed my face. I thought I was I was going to die just like that back there because of it."

The face looking up at me is all soggy with tears. Well, in this world there's no safety net like Japan's public assistance. You could call the slavery system a

safety net of a sort, but still, a slave with no eyesight wouldn't know when they might stop getting fed and starve to death. Thinking about this girl, even my relatively heartless self can't help but feel sympathy for her.

"It's okay, you're okay now. Look, wanna eat a sandwich? I have some water too."

"Sniff, yesh, thank you very much. Thank you, so much."

Yuel begins to voraciously devour the sandwich. Perhaps the slave trader had already stopped feeding her. I guess that means she was left in a corner to rot and die as a useless item when I bought her. That treatment seems cruel, but that may just be how slaves are dealt with. It's forbidden in this country to needlessly take the life of a slave, but it's something to the degree where so long as the slave doesn't actually die, there's no problem. In addition, if it's your own slave, outside of brazenly killing them in the presence of the public, anything goes. The implication of the law is to not spill blood in public places, and to not do anything barbaric. In the event that a slave were to grow weak and die unnoticed, it likely wouldn't even be investigated.

"We'll take a bath once you're done eating."

"Yes, Master is my savior. To the best of my ability, I will wholeheartedly service you."

Wrong. That's not it. Although I must admit, Yuel's healed face is well-featured to the point that I would have no problem calling her a beautiful girl. It's enough to surprise me a little. But it's at least 3... no, 4 years too early for that.

"Ahh, Yuel-san. That's not what I had in mind when I bought you. I bought you so we could explore the labyrinth together."

"The labyrinth? Master is an adventurer? I thought for sure that you were a high-ranking priest, though."

"Ah, you see, I can use healing magic, but I'm not actually a priest. What's more, today I got fired from the hospital I was working at so I'm jobless now. I had just decided to become an adventurer when I saw you, Yuel. You can use daggers, right?"

"Is that so. Err, indeed I have a dagger skill, but how did you...?"

"From the way your muscles are built."

Actually, I was blessed with an Appraisal skill, so that has nothing to do with it, and Yuel is emaciated so she doesn't really have muscle tone in the first place—

"To think that you could tell just from a glance, as expected of Master. Incredible!"

Yuel gives me an innocent look of reverence.

Being flattered by a girl feels great.

"I'm thinking of entering the labyrinth first thing tomorrow morning, so I'll be counting on you."

I don't have much more than 5,900 Zeni on hand. That amount of money would disappear in 3 days at this inn. Yuel is emaciated, but so long as I give her plenty to eat today and tomorrow morning, if I cast healing magic she should be able to move normally. I don't intend to overdo it, but exercise is important for building muscle.

"Yes, please leave the fighting to me. I will protect Master with my life!"

She's extremely fired up.

"Well then, time for a bath."

"Y-Yes. I-It's my first time, so, um, please be gentle."

No, I'm telling you, that's not it.

Without anything particularly eventful happening, I wash Yuel and change her into the clothes I bought for her. When we leave the bath, she asks me things like "You really aren't going to...?" and "So I'm not appealing enough after all?", but I can't possibly follow through on that. Plus I'm not a lolicon.

After that, when it's time for our meal, Yuel eats with gusto. She easily goes through as much as two or three adults. I visit the dining hall on the first floor to get her snacks so many times that the staff think I'm overeating and tell me to stop. My Engel coefficient seems to have climbed steeply, but with Yuel crying

tears of joy and exclaiming “delicious, so delicious” as she chomps down the food, I can’t possibly tell her to stop. Even so, she still seems unsatisfied, so in the end we leave the inn and have a second meal at the tavern where we ate lunch. My remaining Zeni is now a little over 5,700.

Leaving the tavern, we go to a weapon store to buy weapons for Yuel. Yuel is awfully serious about choosing, and finally she settles on two 20cm-long iron knives. Together they come to 5,000 Zeni. I’m left with barely 700 Zeni.

Uh oh.

We return to the inn, and after another meal I climb into bed.

Yuel lies down on the floor.

"No, wait, wait, it’s fine for you to get into bed, Yuel. You’re small, so there’s still room."

As you’d expect, I’d feel guilty getting into bed myself and making a girl sleep on the floor.

"Um, is it alright? I, well, don’t have any charm and all."

Lowering her gaze, she hangs her head in shame.

Should I have said something to follow up after not putting my hands on her? I did say it’s because she’s a child, but apparently she didn’t understand. What should I do?

Button A: “Yuel is a charming woman.”

Isn’t it strange not to put your hands on a beautiful slave?

Game Over.

Button B: “I already think of Yuel as family.”

How could you possibly think of someone as family on the same day you met them? Besides, for someone in her circumstances, the word “family” is complicated. She might be delighted, but the possibility of it being a horrible land mine is rather high too.

Game Over.

"Ahh, err, that's a little, look. Yuel is cute, but you're still a child. But in three of four years I'm sure you'll become a fine lady. When you do I'll have you sleep with me even if you hate it. For now, you can get used to sleeping in the same bed."

"Three years... is it? Yes, I understand. I'll look forward to it with pleasure!"

No, that's not it. Yuel wouldn't get up off the floor. I just wanted her to sleep in a bed so I went with a future promise, that's all.

Oh well. I temporarily get out of bed and lift Yuel up.

Picking Yuel up when she's not even 140cm tall is an easy victory.

"Hyaah!?"

Ignoring Yuel's surprise, I transport her to bed in that manner.

Then, using Yuel as a body pillow, I pull up the covers and go to sleep. There's not much of a sexual feeling, but as a kid her body temperature is nice and warm.

I should have done this from the beginning.

Chapter 3: Entering the Labyrinth

After having breakfast at the inn, then bringing the unsatisfied Yuel to the tavern for a second breakfast, we head to the labyrinth. Yuel can really eat. I only have a bit over 500 Zeni left now. If we don't earn something in the labyrinth today, it's gonna get rather unpleasant. This won't last us a single day. Uh oh.

If this isn't profitable I may have no other choice but to sell Yuel.

After a bath, Yuel became pretty beyond recognition. That waist-length dull gray hair became the glossy silver hair that's characteristic of dark elves. I don't know if it's because she just ate or what, but her complexion has improved a ton, and her lips have turned a girlish scarlet. Her wounds are healed, and now that she's no longer filthy, you could surely say she's a beautiful girl. At this point there should be some demand for her as a pet, so I bet I could make a solid million Zeni by selling her back to a slave merchant. Although she's still a bit slim, and a child, even deducting for those I still think she'd have plenty of market value.

—Ah, I wonder if selling her would be better?

As far as a million Zeni goes, for an inn with no bath and three meals I reckon I could live there for 1,250 days. Yuel is still a child thus not to my tastes, and I just bought her yesterday so our attachment is weak. If I'm gonna sell her, it's now or never. Besides, with the money from selling Yuel I could buy multiple other male skill holders, or maybe I could just live off the profits.

I glance back at Yuel who's walking diagonally behind me, as she's smiling pleasantly and looking happily back at me, and our eyes meet.

Grin.

When she sees me, a delighted expression lights up her face.

I can't do it.

How the hell could I take a girl making a smile like that and knock her down into despair? It's as if she's an infant turning to her parent, such a genuine

smile. My conscience is condemning me severely for lightheartedly thinking of selling her just now. I can't bear this smile. I feel so guilty. Just looking her in the eyes is making me feel ashamed.

As I'm tormented by guilt, we arrive at the labyrinth that's at the heart of this labyrinth city.

The labyrinth in this city is just the labyrinth, it doesn't have a special name. If I had to give it a name I guess it'd just be Merhatz's labyrinth, as is.

This so-called "labyrinth" is surely a dungeon, the very same thing that appears in games. There are over a hundred floors to Merhatz's labyrinth, and each floor has monsters prowling around it. With every floor after the first, the monsters become stronger and more diverse. When you defeat a monster, they "drop" magic stones and raw materials. Upon their death the monsters' corpses immediately vanish, leaving behind said magic stones and occasionally the raw material. I think it's an extremely useful thing, but as for whether this labyrinth is a test given by god, or it's actually bait to draw in lots of living things, there are various opinions but apparently nobody actually knows for sure. Incidentally, magic stones are the raw materials for magic tools, as well as catalysts for spells, and have various other uses. Outside of those, there are also rare drops and treasure chests, so I hear plenty of stories about get-rich-quick schemes.

Well, all you need to know is that if you defeat monsters, you obtain money. The deeper you go, the higher the quality of the magic stones and raw materials, and the more money you obtain. Search for treasure chests with all your power. That's it.

Inside the labyrinth that stands before me, or rather inside this huge box-shaped structure, there aren't that many people since it's morning.

This would be this city's adventurer's guild, and inside it is the entrance to the labyrinth. When we enter, there's a line of reception desks like a municipal office, respectively for new sign-ups, magic stone exchange, raw material exchange and so on.

I head to the new reception counter first, and register as an adventurer.

Having said that, all I do is write my name on a form, receive some simple

advice, and borrow “a certain bracelet”. As for the advice, it was on the level of “always sell magic stones to the adventurer’s guild”, “don’t fight with other adventurers”, and finally “be careful not to die”.

And then, the bracelet. This bracelet has “Item Box magic”, “magic that detects murder”, and “magic that makes it impossible to remove in reaction to the labyrinth’s internal mana” cast on it.

Item Box, as the name implies, is magic that allows you to store items, so I’m told it’s an indispensable magic for adventurers to be able to keep fighting as they collect magic stones and raw materials.

Murder detection magic is a spell that reacts when an adventurer commits the crime of murder within the labyrinth; apparently in the times before this existed there were frequent robbery and assassination ambushes within the labyrinth.

Also, this bracelet is required to be worn upon entering the labyrinth, and cannot be removed once inside.

This bracelet is the symbol of an adventurer, it’s a convenient Item Box, and it’s also used as a collar to regulate adventurers.

"Master, I’m looking forward to it!"

After putting on the bracelet, Yuel is all smiles. That smile is conveying her restlessness and excitement. What’s with this feeling? I get the feeling I’ve seen it somewhere before for some reason.

Yeah, it’s *that*.

It’s the same mood as a child tugging on their parent’s hand, saying “hurry, hurry!” in front of an amusement park.

We’re about to go to a labyrinth swarming with fiendish monsters, though. It’s a place where if things go poorly there’s the risk of death as well. Saying she’s looking forward to it, is Yuel that confident in her own skill? Or does she just think that her kind, gentle master wouldn’t take her somewhere dangerous? If that’s the case, I’ll feel pretty guilty. I feel like I’m gonna have a nervous breakdown soon. But our livelihood is at stake, so I’m taking her either way.

Apparently she was quite self-assured.

Leaning forward damn near parallel to the ground, Yuel dashes through the labyrinth with a knife in each hand. Opposite us are two Goblins, monsters from the third floor of Merhatz's labyrinth. Goblins are monsters about the same size as human children, with strong physical strength despite their short stature, a dangerous monster to face in numbers even for an adult.

Yuel easily evades the Goblin's club as it tries to intercept her, then slips her knife through and slashes as if stroking its arm. The club falls from the Goblin's hand. Looks like the tendon on the inside of its arm has been cut. Running past the other goblin's attack, she twists the upper half of her body to avoid it. Having taken their backs, Yuel aims for the neck of the uninjured Goblin, the one on the right from my perspective. Given the shortness of the knife she can't behead it, but Yuel cleanly slices its artery from behind in one stroke. Paying no heed to the Goblin as it collapses in a spurt of blood as the light fades from its eyes, Yuel returns her attention to the Goblin whose arm she previously sliced and thrusts her knife into its eyeball from the front. Hardcore. The knife must have reached its brain; the second Goblin crumples and falls.

"Even Goblins are instant kills, huh...?"

Yuel, 12 years old. Now that I think about it, Yuel's age is exactly as she appears, 12 years old. Since she was a dark elf, I considered the possibility of "she looks like a child, but she's actually hundreds of years old!", but even though elves and dark elves have a long lifespan, they grow at the same rate as humans until about the age of 15. That Yuel-san is 12 years old.

She's crazy strong.

These aren't the movements of a child. Dodge and strike, dodge and strike, they're totally sharp. She easily dispatched the Fang Rabbits on the first floor and the Salt Puppets on the second floor with no challenge, and even the third floor Goblins can't contend with her. Moreover, because her physical condition has been perfect so far, I can't even tell the extent of her ability. Incredible.

The Goblin corpses transform into particles of light and dissolve into the air.

"Master! How was that?"

Picking up the magic stones and clubs dropped by the Goblins, Yuel rushes over to me in a way that screams “praise me, praise me!”. Her elf ears are twitching, and her upturned eyes are gazing at me in anticipation. She feels like a dog that was ordered to wait and is dying to be rewarded. I guess all I can do is pet her.

"Who's a good girl, who's a good girl, yes you aaaare."

As I rub her silver hair all over and praise her, Yuel becomes bashfully happy. This is kinda soothing.

It turns out Yuel was quite a bargain.

To be honest, I wasn't even hoping for anything more than her to have enough skill not to lose against the weakest-class monster from the first floor, Fang Rabbit. I mean, she's still a child. It's the weakest thing in this labyrinth, no bigger than a normal rabbit. It's a monster that pretty much can't give you a fatal wound so long as it doesn't get its fangs into your throat, but its movements are agile so it's fairly difficult to hit. And yet Yuel is able to accurately thrust her knife under its chin when it pounces at her. All of her battles with Fang Rabbits were one-hit kills. And she made it through the first floor unharmed.

The Salt Puppet on the second floor is a humanoid monster with a body made of salt, and chunks of salt are what it drops. This guy's movements are slow, and it's not that powerful, just a tough monster with no apparent weak points. I was sure that it would take Yuel a while to deal with it, but in one swing of its arm, Yuel had waved the knives she was holding in each hand 5 times. She hacked away at the Salt Puppet in a way that reminded me of the Dual Blades style from a certain [hunting game](#), ending the fight before 20 seconds had elapsed. In that fashion, she made it through the second floor unharmed as well.

And this time it's the third floor, Goblins. Goblins are powerful, and more agile than a Salt Puppet. Furthermore, some of them have weapons like clubs or knives. Unlike the previous monsters, even one-on-one there's the possibility of dying if things don't go well. And yet she crushed them flawlessly just like before, not to mention two of them at the same time.

If I had to name a problem, it's that I'm not doing a thing. Yuel is unharmed.

No, it's not like I want her to get injured, but I haven't used healing magic once since we entered the labyrinth. There's no meaning to my existence. And not just in battle, Yuel is also finding the monsters and monitoring our surroundings. It's not quite to the degree of beast-kin, but dark elves' senses are fairly well-attuned. I've just been walking behind Yuel, observing her brilliant combat, and praising her when she rushes back over. I've become a mere leech.

No, we're master and slave so there shouldn't be any problem with that, but looking at my circumstances objectively I can't help but feel like I'm doing something terribly wrong. Well, I do have the role of recovery if it happens to come to that, but I get the feeling I could send Yuel off into the labyrinth alone with "you can just use recovery potions, right?" and nothing would change. And all of the income would go into my pockets.

As far as I can tell from Yuel's expression she's happy, so maybe it's fine like this, but I feel awfully ashamed, or perhaps I should say obligated. If the slave was some middle-aged guy rather than Yuel, I might have no problem working him to the bone, but Yuel's young outward appearance is shaking my conscience.

And yet I've never even held a weapon before. If I swung around a sword I'd probably just get in Yuel's way, and if I used a bow I'd likely end up shooting her in the back. I've had customers back at the hospital teach me a little about attack magic before, but I wasn't able to use it at all. I can't think of any ways to fight. Besides, I don't want to face off with Goblins and stuff in the first place. I do have the confidence that I won't die since I can immediately recover from even a fatal wound, but this and that are different stories.

As I'm contemplating, Yuel is still energetically hacking up Goblins, recovering their dropped weapons and bringing them over while holding her head in a position that's easy for me to pet.

About all I can do at this point is pet her with all my heart. Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure there was [a game](#) where you made monsters into your allies that had a system where grooming them improved their motivation and increased their stats. Yuel's motivation is already full, but if I continue to pet her half-heartedly, eventually that may end up falling as well. This is it.

Yuel's hair is long and straight. I take her rustled hair and carefully brush it along its natural direction, causing Yuel to twist her body ticklishly.

"You're really great, Yuel."

Squatting down to look her in the eyes, I gently pet along her cheeks and the contours of her chin. When I do, she nuzzles her face into my hand and bashfully closes her eyes in bliss. She responds with a shy "ehehe", and meets each of my continued pets with a cute reaction.

Yeah. My job is to get along well with Yuel. I'm starting to feel like things will be fine this way. And it's soothing. Besides, it's getting kinda fun.

Chapter 4: Lulca's party

"Well, let's go eat at the tavern" (Shiki)

"Yes, my master!" (Yuel)

After Goblin hunting throughout the afternoon, the drops I sold at the Guild earned me a little over 2,000 Zeni.

We only spent roughly 4 hours in the Labyrinth, but earned a decent amount of Zeni. Given that the typical wages of day laborer does not make even 1,000 Zeni. Yuel's pretty excellent to have earned 2,000 Zeni in half a work day. She's turning out to be a good purchase. In addition to her excellent performance in the Labyrinth. Yuel is a very obedient child.

Yuel looks at the sushi with a innocent child like smile. I was anticipating this moment. Looking at her eat, gives me a sort of healing feeling. I feel like I can now understand how a mother hen feels feeding her chicks. And earlier when I patted Yuel's head at the end of each battle, I also started feeling less tense.

"Well Yuel, what do you think?" (Shiki)

"It is delicious, master!" (Yuel)

Looking at Yuel stuff her self, made me happy. Yuel with a radiant smile directed me to sit with her face to face as she ate. If this was Eris eating in front of me I'd probably think she was hiding her scary personality.

"Hey" (annoyed voice)

I turn around to see the tom boyish girl, Ruruka. Ruruka is also someone that I would think was hiding her scary personality. I wonder what I did for her to greet me like that. Ah, maybe she's lonely.

I'd like to comfort her in the bed if possible.

"Hello" (Shiki)

"Yo, I've been waiting for you so long, I was beginning to wonder if you were even going to come. Because I wanted to talk with you." (Ruruka)

She turned to the side when she said "Because I wanted to talk" This is way too good to be true.

I don't think her remarks and attitude are genuine in the least. Ruruka is clever, she knows what gesture to use to depending on the man to get what she wants. She's that type of person.

"Who is this person, Master?" (Yuel)

I Should probably introduce Yuel to Ruruka, since this is their first time meeting. But, Ruruka is likely to call me a lolicon if I introduce Yuel....I don't feel like introducing them.

"Master? So this cute little girl is your slave? I didn't realize your preferences were like that." (Ruruka)

Uwa, I got called a Lolicon without even introducing them. It's an unavoidable misunderstanding considering that you would never think that Yuel is a combat slave at first glance. Still, I don't consent.

"Yuel, this is Ruruka. She was a regular when i worked at the healer clinic. Ruruka, this child is the combat slave I bought yesterday for my for my party." (Shiki)

"I see, it's nice to meet you Yuel-chan" (Ruruka)

Yuel quickly hides behind me. It seems she's scared, or maybe she's just a shy person. Now that I think about it, she also acted like this when we first met. Ruruka doesn't seem to think much of it.

"So you're going to take the cute little Yuel-chan to the Labyrinth?" (Ruruka)

"We already explored lightly into the Labyrinth today, we fought up to Goblins" (Shiki)

Although I didn't get to check the level of enemy Yuel can handle, it's fine to do that later, Yuel isn't perfect and I should research demon the hierarchy as well.
"Oh? For such a cute girl to be so skilled at this age, isn't that amazing?"

(Ruruka)

That's right. Yuel is so cute it's a sin. Somehow I feel like I'm a Bragging father boasting about his child.

"Ah, it seems that Yuel has skill **proficiency with Dagger.**" (Shiki)

"I See. Since I'm the only front line attacker in my party, I wonder if Yuel-chan would like to join my party if she ever comes to hate Shiki." (Ruruka)

"Hey! What are you trying to pull, poaching someone else's party member?"
(Shiki)

Well, saying that it's not like Yuel would ever leave my party. What a joke. Yuel is to earnest for that, although I guess it's not like Ruruka is serious anyways.

"I, I will never ever come to hate Master!!!" (Yuel)

I thought so. That would absolutely be impossible. Though me saying that makes me happy, I wonder why I can trust Yuel so much? Ah, must be because she's my slave, I convince myself.

"Hey, Shiki. Did you really only buy her yesterday? For Yuel-chan to be so attached to you, isn't that strange?" (Ruruka)

"Are you saying that it's strange for someone to get attached to me so easily?
Sigh After I bought Yuel, I treated a wound on her face." (Shiki)

"Yes! Master also healed my collapsed nose, missing eyes and my torn and battered ears. All while treating me gently as if he was my husband. Master is my precious person!" (Yuel)

"Eh? It doesn't look like there was such a terrible wound. There are no scars at all!" (Ruruka)

"Well that's thanks to my ability." (Shiki)

To be so precise as to not leave a scratch with healing magic, it's said that there is significant technology and magic needed. Well, in my case, it's do to my healing ability, so I don't use high amounts of magic to heal, nor do I really do much research on the matter.

"Oh? Then I hope I can continue be apart of such an ability." (Ruruka)

"I don't" (Shiki)

I expected this, I hope she doesn't think I'll heal for free. Although there's it's

not like it's a disadvantage for me to do it for free, I can't really afford to do so. I have to consider how and when I work.

"E-eh? Is this because of what happened at Eris's shop? Where else am I going to find a healer who heals scars for a good price!? I'll properly pay 200 Zeni and a give special service, this is a fair price right?" (Ruruka)

Speaking of Eris, she also has said that it's considerably hard to get rid of scars. That it takes time to do such dense work when it needs great concentration and control of magic. However, the price is reasonable if you consider her special service. Though I am cheap in comparison to the market, it is the same price I used at Eris's Clinic. Still, it's cheap indeed. Although, it is a great feeling to grope through cloth's in this world, considering they don't have undergarments. I also wonder if I can take the special service by force if i have to?

"Fine. You better properly pay up this time." (Shiki)

I'd rather not give the discount, but since I'm low on money anyways. I think it's fine. Although I'm wondering if I should do this in the tavern.

"Good, good. You'll heal the wound properly right?" (Ruruka)

Ruruka pays up front with the money taken out of her bank card. Prepaid? That's unusual. I have a bad feeling about this. It's the same kind of atmosphere that the slave trader gave off when he quickly left after selling Yuel. "I want to do this fast before he changes his mind" I get that kind of feeling.

"Hey, come over" (Ruruka)

There were two girls in the direction Ruruka called. One person with a witch like feeling who had blonde twin tails. The other one was a girl with blue hair in a bobbed style hair cut carrying a bow, she had a gave a composed feeling. The Blonde girl about 16, while the Blue haired girl looked about 18. The two girls rise from their seats and walk over. The twin tailed Blonde gives me a glare as she comes over. Blue hair sighs at the Blondes glare.

"The Blonde is Franc, and the other girl is Sera. They are my party members" (Ruruka)

"Hmph" (Franc)

"Thank you for always taking care of Ruruka" (Sera)

Franc scoffs at me, while Sera politely gives her greetings.

"Ah, I am Shiki and this is my party member Yuel" (Shiki)

We exchange greetings. And then Yuel gives her greetings as well.

Speaking to Ruruka's party is a bit painstakingly annoying. Definitely because of the Blonde

Even now her face is turned away from me with a dour look. It seems that she doesn't bother with men.

"I'd like you to treat Franc's shoulder, it's not a life threatening wound, but, she was bitten by an Assault bat and suffered a side effect that's causing hemostasis, and that can very harmful." (Ruruka)

TN: Hemostasis: The stopping of a flow of blood.

I understand why adventures why adventures go into the labyrinth, but I don't think that women should be fighting against the demons, even if they have skills. Labyrinth searches especially have a lucrative amount of danger in them. However in this world it appears that the difference in ability is smaller than in my original world.

Anyways, onto Franc. Although itself is not visible injury from wearing a robe, a lobe is torn a little, and you can see a small bandage covering it. I try to avoid eye contact with her. Usually I would I get a good amount of pleasure from watching my cute clients turn away with embarrassment over the fact that a handsome healer was staring at them as I gave them treatment. This is not the case with Franc. Franc looks at me with a mixture of contempt and disgust. There's no value in a woman who has is all tsun and no dere. Let's not be honest about that part.

"Hey hey, why do you have drills for twin tails?" (Shiki)

I don't understand why she has them. Anyway, somehow I fell like I want to fool around the drills and feel the full force of such a distinctive hairstyle that is hard to set every morning.

"Shiki, it seems we won't be paying anymore?" (Ruruka)

TN: I think this is about the special discount. Anyways this was confusing so I left a bit out

Ah, this is why she payed upfront. Ruruka knows my personality well. I can already imagine Franc leaving the tavern in a fit of rage. Although it's not sexual harassment to say "So I can take a better look at the infected area, take of your robe?" Franc would still probably exit in a fit of rage. And since I can't say I

won't cure her after I've already received the money, it will be tricky to sexually harass Franc without offending her. Although even if I try something Ruruka would stop it.

I Really have no idea how I would do it.

Though. if you look at them per breast. Franc's chest is as much of a shame as her personality.

Shame indeed. Especially since Sera has a larger bust to the extent that you can see the package and Ruruka also has her nice bust hidden behind her breastplate. It's a hidden type of busty. it's a shame that these are the only tits I met this time.

"Healing fires" A warm light gathers over Franc's shoulder.

I can't really confirm it, but the wound is probably healed. Franc doesn't let up on her bad expression even after confirming the state of her shoulder. It seems to have healed.

"Are you Not going to give thanks?" (Shiki)

"I think it's rude to ask for appreciation" (Franc)

That pissed me off a bit, but I'm not so inclined as to show it here. It's a healing thing to have Yuel here in many ways. I don't want to be showing her an unsightly appearance. I thought want her to be frightened by an angry me. It's a strange feeling, considering I'm a whirlpool of a personality.

"Although she has that expression on her face, Franc isn't a bad girl." (Ruruka)
Saying this doesn't seem to disturb Franc's bad expression at all. Even so, there should be a degree to how much you can be a man-hater. It'll be difficult to live if a majority of your conversations are unpleasant and you can't even say thank you.

Ah, so that's why she became an adventure.

After the treatment is over, Ruruka and her party leave the tavern.

Just before she left though, Ruruka gave her regards and said that she would of gave me the special service of groping her chest if I had insisted. I had determined that her adamant refusal would stay the same, so I did not ask again for the special service. It's a shame, but there's not point in crying over spilt milk.

....It's still a shame though....

End of the day Gold: Approximately 2,600 Zeni.

Chapter 5: Feed the Sandwich

Day after the treatment of Franc.

I wake up with Yuels face directly in front of mine. We're on the same 1 person sized bed that we were on yesterday, in the same manner as yesterday. Still, for a single sized bed, it's pretty warm and comfortable. It's Spring right now and the weather is a bit chilly.

In this world there are four seasons, it's almost exactly like Earths calendar. The difference is in the terms, it is January of Spring now. In the sense that the first month of Spring in Japan is March.

The morning is decently cool.

Clinging onto me, it was easy to understand that Yuel is extremely thin. Although it's common to think that slim girls are the best, there's a profusely noticeable feel of bone. I was thinking of exploring deeper into the labyrinth, but that may still be impossible for Yuel. It will be troubling if a mistake is caused by her lack of strength or agility. It'll be easy to heal physical wounds, but if she loses confidence or gets a fear of monsters because of a mistake, I can't heal mental wounds. And I can also afford to not go deeper into the Labyrinth for now. I have enough for tomorrows accommodation fees as well. And since defeating Goblins is a cinch, it might be nice to not go deeper for now.

While inspecting Yuel's body, I think all that. Yuel awakens with a slightly red face and is staring at me with a surprised facial expression. She then closes her eyes as if waiting for a kiss...

Wrong!

This is a misunderstanding. I didn't mean to be toying with Yuel's body, I was only checking to see if her body was healthy. I didn't mean for her to become embarrassed. But now I've been misunderstood and Yuel is closing her eyes and waiting for a kiss.

I wonder if I should give the kiss or not. I feel that I won't be able to escape being called a Lolicon.

It's also impossible for me to correct Yuel's misunderstanding. This is

dangerous, there's a possibility of this escalating past just a kiss. To make matters worse, Yuel has changed from her face being slightly red, too being dyed in bright red. But in the end, this is my mistake. This is embarrassing. I don't think I'm blushing, but i wonder what state I'm in. In this situation it's possible to start pointing your finger and laughing at a woman, for example if the woman was Franc. But this opponent is the pure and lovely Yuel. Getting out of this situation could ruin her pure and innocent smile...

What to do...

Mission "Get rid of this opportunity without hurting Yuel" **Start!**

Normally in this situation one would kiss. However this is very likely to create problems in the future. It's a risk of our relationship escalating. A sinful relationship between a loli slave who yearns for you. If possible I want to continue a pure relationship for a few more years. Too sexually assault a loli slave is respectably too evil. If I were to have any sort of respectable sex, it would likely be with Ruruka. And although it is true that I'm yearning to do it when I see the Pure Yuel giving me such an expression and that I feel like i'm being ripped to pieces for tricking such a girl. Such a thing, I couldn't. I have to choose another option other than that.

.....

Ah, it's useless. There's not enough time to think. Yuel is still red from ear to ear and her eyes are starting to water.

"tsu....." (Yuel)

Oh shit. Yuel feeling ashamed is dangerous, that's also something I have to watch out for. This could be bad if I don't take precaution. I'll just do this for now. Immediately I begin stroking the back of Yuels head. I rhythmically stroke her smooth silver hair. Her very soft and light hair. And with every stroke I ask myself what I should do.

What to do.

What to do.

Perhaps because I've only failed at this up till now, i don't have enough experience to comfort her.

The only thing I can think to say is "HueHueHue, young lady-chan, I'll comfort you in bed,"

It's useless.

Saying that kind of thing here is fundamentally wrong.

"Well, let's do that kind of thing when you're a little older. okay? For now we are going to sleep well, eat plenty and work in moderation" (Shiki)

Children's General weapon skill "I wish" lvl up.

TN: I consider this a failure on my part. No idea how to word it better.

I fell like I've used this skill before. This is the only comfort skill I have, It's main use isn't even for comforting. Also I'd rather wish to just say "For now sleep well and eat plenty", since Yuel is still a child. But since we'd have no money if I didn't have her work, I have no choice but to limit my kindness.

Depressed "As I thought....I really don't have any appeal" (Yuel)

"I don't think that" (Shiki)

Yuel still has a sulking expression. It would be best ot not be flimsy with my action here. I can't afford for this to go wrong.

"Right now Yuel is a child, but in a couple of years. Yuel will be a charming woman. I guarantee this." (Shiki)

"Me? A charming woman....Yes. I'll do my best to become a charming woman!" (Yuel)

Yuel's facial expression brightens up. Easy-peasy

I was a little afraid to give her to much praise, but it seems to have worked out. I've safely completed my duties.

Mission Complete!

Although staying at this inn cost 500 Zeni a night, not staying in a place with a bath would be bad.

I also have to buy some good clothes for Yuel, and pay for food at the tavern. The tavern's food taste pretty good, so I also always leave a decent tip for the miniskirt wearing waitress. It's a Japanese style tavern that changed from a mercenary type establishment. In addition to the style, the menu as well as the personnel were changed, The new menu is much more balanced and is suitable for the growing Yuel. The older Menu was aimed more at bodybuilders, focusing farm more on the protein aspect. For today's lunch we ordered about

4 servings of sandwiches as our bento, I placed them in my item box. Engel's Law is a dangerous thing.

TN: Engel's law is the statistical study that shows that even as your income increases, people still pay the same percentage of money for food. Thus as you gain more income, your expenditures on food increase.

The entrance to the Labyrinth is in the adventurer's guild. There's a stone staircase that leads down to the floor to the entrance of the Labyrinth. The path to the Labyrinth from there on has rugged stone for walls and the only light is at the destination. The Labyrinth is just like one you would see in the Rougelike game series. The Labyrinth's opening is very tight and only has enough room for a person and their equipment, later on the rooms become large. The Labyrinth is very maze like and is built in a combination of small room and passages. There's a good chance to get lost or at least you would if it wasn't for the route. The shortest route to the lowest floor is connected through intervals and is paths with a good amount of signpost as well. The Labyrinth is regularly explored by the adventures guild and so far have cleared up to the 56th floor. Because of this it's very unlikely for someone to get lost if you follow the signpost. It also only takes a couple hours to fully search each floor and proceed onto the next floor. However the amount of monsters in the vicinity of the regular route is low. That's due to the plenty of adventurers that frequently go back and forth on the route. So to hunt on a floor you need to search after entering a side path from the normal route. There is also a higher chance of finding treasure boxes on the the side paths, rather than the main route. Today's goal is to look for treasure boxes while hunting goblins on the 3rd floor. I hold onto our bento's while watching Yuel fight Goblins like she did yesterday. This time it was a group of 4 Goblins.

Yuel immediately rushes forward and cuts down two Goblins easily. As she does that 1 of the Goblins rushes towards me.

Only to be killed by Yuels throwing knife. She then moves onto the last Goblin and inserts her knife deeply into its eye-socket. Although the fight wasn't harsh, fighting groups of 4 might be our limit. Yuel aside, if a Goblin come towards me I'm likely to be beaten. Yuel by herself is likely to be fine fighting against larger

groups, but I would be a problem as i don't have any sort of weapon. The only thing I have at hand is our sandwich bento's. I don't fight with Yuel, because most likely I would just be in the way. Though I do have the defensive option of healing myself and I can use an abundant amount of magic, I might die if don't heal myself before I'm beaten. Such a situation.... I don't even want to think about it.

The easiest thing to do, would be to send Yuel into the Labyrinth alone. But if I can easily Imagine that after Yuel diving into the Labyrinth, I would be fidgeting in frustration, worry and guilt while at the inn. I feel far better being with her. I need to be a person who can only smile and laugh, someone who doesn't get mad. It seems to be necessary to have some self-defense options, before we venture further into the Labyrinth.

After retrieving the drops from the Goblins, I stroke Yuels head gently. We then begin eating our sandwich bento's. Because Yuel's hands are dirty I feed her like lovers would going "An". Looking at Yuel gnaw on her sandwich made it feel as if we weren't just fighting Goblins, like it was an illusion. The Sandwiches are made with a green leafy vegetable that resembles lettuce, chunky ham, a type of salty-sweet dressing that's white with various spices.

The sandwich I held for Yuel slowly started to disappear until I could only hold it with 2 fingers. As I was feeding the last piece of sandwich, Yule grabs my hand. And then I felt a sudden warm sensation on my fingers.

Yuel licked me. Yuel is licking my fingers. She's slowly licking off the white dressing off my fingertip. She licks my middle finger, then my index finger and even my thumb. I tried to withdraw my hand, but Yuel held onto my wrist firmly. My thumb in particular was drenched in dressing. And with my thumb hanging from her panting mouth I can feel the heat and the wetness of her mouth. Yuel licks and sucks on my thumb with a shallow breath.

"The dressing is spicy" (Yuel)

This, this could jeopardize my lower body. No all that happened was a slave cleaning her masters dirty hand. Surely it was for the sake of hygiene. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to be misunderstood. Even so...Indeed this is. What Yuel did only seems immoral. Trying to reason with this is dangerous.

Somehow while maintaining my reason, I make it to the purchase counter.

Today's earning is 3,100 Zeni. This time we continues to hunt until about 3

o'clock, but we still didn't discover a treasure box.

From what I heard at the Guild purchase counter, it seems it's easier to get treasure boxes the deeper you travel into the Labyrinth. The deeper you go in, the less adventures you find, so it's easier to find treasure boxes. Apparently treasure boxes are relocated once they've been discovered, but it seems to take a while.

I want to venture deeper into the Labyrinth, but I'm afraid I would be beaten. For now we'll continue fighting Goblins until I've accumulated enough gold to buy some self-defense equipment.

Chapter 6: Choosing a weapon

Soon it will be the first day of the month. We continued to hunt Goblins on the 3rd floor. I already have amassed and secured the necessary budget of 5000 Zeni to purchase a weapon.

What I am buying this time, is a one-handed mace, a weapon that is oriented solely towards beginner adventurers.

There are surprisingly a lot of advantages to a mace.

Although you have to possess some physical strength to use mace skills to a certain extent, you can also handle it without them.

It is different from a sword which you can't straightforwardly swing without having any plan regarding the direction of the blade. Even simply swinging down the mace with all one's might will allow you to expect plenty of damage. You could even say that the mace covers the users inability to use skills to some extent.

Furthermore, the weapon degradation is small.

For example, something like the knives Yuel uses where their sharpness are an important aspect, would end up with a chip in the blade before long after continuously striking the hard monster parts like bones and claws.

There is also the possibility of shattering the blade if the attack of the opponent is intercepted poorly.

To put it bluntly, the mace is just an ordinary iron shaft.

Even though the grip portion is coiled with leather to allow grasping it, it has a shape where the center of gravity is located at the upper portion of the shaft.

However, due to that the mace has different sturdiness than an edged weapon, allowing it to be used to stop monster attacks without worrying about the weapon's durability.

For someone who doesn't possess the necessary skill to evade the incoming attacks of an enemy, it is very user-friendly.

Maa, if you talk about the priest class it has to be blunt weapons anyway, isn't that so? Even though such simple way of thinking was just an excuse, after listening to the arguments and examining it, I got the impression that blunt weapons are easy to handle.

Thus, it will be the mace.

This time I will purchase an iron rod similar to a metal bat.

The only difference from a bat is that its upper portion slightly increases in width towards the tip.

Though I wanted it to be something stylish like a club covered with thorns, I was advised by the occhan from the weapon shop to give up on something like that.

Such things as flanged maces and maces bearing spikes are apparently difficult to use for repelling attacks.

I don't want to be defeated by monsters just because I tried too hard to act like a Gori Gori macho (T/N: Gorilla) either! But that's not all there is to it, receiving an attack while in a disturbed defense position can send you flying due to the impact and lead to a quick loss. Apparently there have already been situations like that.



The stairs leading towards the 4th floor of the labyrinth.

Going beyond this point, there will be the monsters of the fourth floor, Greenbies.

Greenbies are plant monsters who imitate people. At the same place on both arms they have something resembling ivies to attack with as characteristic.

By delivering whipping blows, it appears that the ivy restricts the approach of the opponents.

Restraint.

As the female adventurer is tied up and suspended in midair, she will be single-mindedly groped there

There might also be such an unpleasant development like her loudly crying as the ivies spread her open, huh?

In case the female adventurer were to be surrounded by a great number of Greenbies, she might also be weakened due to quickly being covered all over with ivies and thus becoming immobile, isn't that right?

The delusion advances.

I definitely want to see Ruruka's party battling these by all means.



We advanced following the signpost.

There was only one of them in a large room.

Yuel, who saw the Greenby first, started dashing towards it.

Today I am holding the sandwiches and water flasks as well while spectating.

Although I brought the mace along carrying it on my back for the time being, I don't have any intention to fight on a regular basis at all.

I have no doubt that I would only become a hindrance to Yuel.

The Greenby, who wielded the ivy like a whip, made it difficult for Yuel to close the distance.

Using the green ivy with great vigor, it decided to aim at Yuel describing an arc.

And then, drawing the same trajectory was Yuel's knife.

The ivy was cut and flew away.

Following the flow, the second ivy likewise flew in the direction of the day after tomorrow.

The Greenby already lost all it means to mount an attack.

Yuel thrust her knife into its neck as it simply stood stock still. (T/N: It's a plant after all *nods*)

It became light particles and vanished without being able to stop the dashing Yuel even once.

The combat was merely a few seconds.

But even so, originally the ivy attack, which is just like a swinging whip, is a formidable threat.

Even if I tried to block the ivy with my mace, I am sure the flexible ivy would KO me by hitting the back of my head without change.

Maa, since you might as well call this monster a plant, its offensive ability might not be that high, but I am surely not able to go ahead like Yuel and insta-kill it.

Apparently Yuel's level is too high.

In the first place, Yuel can exterminate them by herself without me accompanying her.

There is no need for me to forcefully try to participate in the battles.

To the bitter end I only got the mace for self-defense in case we are surrounded by a great number of enemies.



We advanced a considerable distance through the 4th floor.

It is about time for us to see the entrance to the 5th floor soon, isn't it?

As I was carefully, delicately, tenderly caressing Yuel's hair like a treasure, unexpectedly two figures of people appeared on the other side of the signpost.

One person was lending their shoulder to the other person as they steadily walked towards us.

It was a pair of male adventurers.

Both of them are around 20 years old, huh?

Watching them getting close, the short man carried the tall man half on his shoulders as they walked.

And then there was a line of blood in their wake.

It was the injured person.

"Oi, are you alright?" (Shiki)

“A-Are you a priest? That’s good. This guy lost his leg when a Giant Ant bit him. We didn’t encounter any other adventurers on the pathway today, either. As it is, I don’t know whether he’ll last until we reach the surface. I beg you, it’s fine to only stop his bleeding, too. Can you please heal him?” (Shorty)

I have entered the labyrinth wearing my usual habit, but I am not a priest.

Although I am not a priest I can still use Healing magic.

Maa, explaining it properly is just too troublesome, just think what you like.

“There is nothing left from the left leg below the thigh... Was it eaten? That’s terrible. Ex-Heal. (Shiki) (ED: He took a bite to the knee.)

Should I rip them off in regards to the reward for the medical treatment? I considered this as well. After all he bled quite a lot.

The tall man’s face, man A, is quite pale resulting from the hemorrhage. His body is shivering due to the loss of blood, too.

If man A is left alone in this state, they would resent me quite a bit for starting such a thing like negotiations to overcharge the amount of reward money.

Furthermore, as the man is worn out, negotiations are pointless, too.

“You...” (Man A)

“Ex Heal?” (Man B)

Man A and B were surprised by the instant reformation of the leg.

There aren’t many people able to use healing magic to the degree of Ex Heal.

Or perhaps I should say that it is rather quite rare.

Although I didn’t intend to excessively show off either, if there is a injured person in front of my eyes, I won’t conceal my ability to the extent of not healing them, not for such reason at least.

“You are lucky to meet such a skilled healing magician like myself.” (Shiki)

“Incredible...” (Man A)

“Who are you that you can instantly heal such levels of damage... No, it doesn’t matter. Thank you for saving him.” (Man B)

With an astonished face Man A was making sure that he could feel his leg. Separating from Man B, he is now able to stand on his own two feet by himself.

Ah, it is completely healed.

Although I don't have such courage to leave an originally wounded person unattended, I healed him and for that healing my greed appeared.

I want remuneration.

I want money.

However, are these fellows so admirable as to pay a large amount of money by deferred payment?

I don't know.

They might pay or might not pay.

Well, the Giant Ant is a monster of the 6th floor.

These guys seem to have received lethal injuries from the monsters on the 6th floor.

Also I was shown at this place today that it isn't a good idea to rush through the floors without counterbalancing your abilities after all.

I have a feeling that it is unlikely for them to have saved up plenty of money considering the situation at hand.

"As expected of Master!" (Yuel)

Witnessing my healing magic, Yuel faced me with a sparkling gaze of reverence.

What a pleasant feeling.

I think it can be summed up as "The injury was cured by healing magic." at this point, don't you agree?

My face was watched with a mixture of excitement and fascination.

What an awfully pleasant feeling.

That's right, I have to be Yuel's esteemed master after all.

Somehow that's the feeling I got.

I want Yuel to respect me even more.

I want her to stare at me with more and more reverence.

Instead of money, this will serve as a stepping stone to resolutely appeal my virtue.

It has an atmosphere of a mysterious brilliant healing specialist traveling the dangerous labyrinth and gallantly moving around treating the injured he encounters. (T/N: What a brainfried moron xD)

In this very moment I can say with confidence that I am the master of the unselfish and pure Yuel.

"There is no need to pay me money. Take good care of the life you were given. Yuel, let's go!" (Shiki)

Choosing a magnificent turn, I departed without waiting for their response.

"Tsu...! Yes, master!" (Yuel)

As it's just about time anyway, it is fine to return, too.

I wonder if Yuel is moved by my attitude of not wanting to receive compensation for the medical treatment? Her round and cute eyes are more and more glittering as she looked in this direction.

Ah, it feels good.

I am sure, within Yuel's mind my stocks undoubtedly must have risen depicting a 90° degree line.

I am most likely extremely cool right now.

"Is it fine? Well, you are incredibly skilled, couldn't you be employed by the royal castle as a junior? I am glad to have met you, hahahahaha !" (Man B)

I felt a slight shock running through my back.

It is Man B.

Holding my shoulders against my will, he firmly beat them without me knowing what was so enjoyable.

“Niichan, you are a good fellow! Even if you are smelling of blood and got dirt under your nails, I want to go drinking with you!” (Man A)

Before I became aware of it, Man A was energetically talking next to me.

Furthermore accompanying me all the way.

A~re, something’s different.

It is different from my mental image.

In my mental image Man A and B are supposed to be dumbfounded by my overly amazing healing magic.

After my gallant departure, I expected them to say "This unselfish, stylish and mysterious Shinto priest, who the heck was that!" or something along those lines.

Man AB’s recovery is much too early.

Oh well, as expected of adventurers, huh?

They quickly change gears.

Although I planned to separate here from Man AB, the direction to return to is the same, isn’t it?

I am an idiot, huh? (T/N: Well concluded, Sherlock)

I thought it would be stylish to turn my back on them and leave them be as is, but I perfectly dug my own grave.

I got excessively spellbound with myself and thus my ability to think dropped.

Haa, it is only revolting and has no meaning if it’s men clinging to me.



“Really, Shiki? This fellow Eris is a really cruel fellow!” (Man A)

“That’s true, isn’t it? Firing me for just accidentally touching breasts a bit? That’s not something you would do, would you?” (Shiki)

“I tell ya, there aren’t so many excellent guys like Shiki. What was that person thinking.” (Man B)

“Ah, really, you are completely right there!” (Shiki)

“””Hahahahahaha!!””” (San Baka)

The location changed to the usual bar.

Well, considering my story with a very good heart, those guys are really nice.

The tall guy, who was injured earlier, is Eight (T/N: >> Eito <<)

The short guy with the crude language seems to be Geyser. (T/N: >> Geiza <<)

Like that, me and Yuel were treated to a meal in a corner of the bar.

“However, even if you are able to only use healing magic, you should be very popular with any healing institution, don’t you agree?” (Eight)

“No, speaking between you and me, the problem is that I am not really a priest. I haven’t studied being one either. I don’t want others to stick their nose’s into these circumstances too much. Please keep it a secret that I can use Ex Heal, too.” (Shiki)

It is possible that not being a priest isn’t a problem either, but there is a possibility of bringing unnecessary trouble onto myself.

Even if there is no problem with it, going by Eris’s information, it is necessary to intensely practice for many years to somehow reach the degree of being able to finally heal damage with the exception of severe injuries.

The sort of "

Though I have trained at the church this much, what’s up with that guy!

" jealousy is scary.

“Ah there are special circumstances. Ah, but isn’t it fine to open a private medical treatment institution then?” (Eight)

“That’s true. You are hanging out here every day, no? Isn’t it fine to borrow one table here? Something with the feeling of a healing business stall.” (Geyser)

“With your skill, I don’t mind coming here.” (Eight)

“Likewise it will be fine to spread it amongst our adventurer fellows!”
(Geyser)

Healing business stall.

Such a concept doesn't exist.

After all, I will always dive into the labyrinth for about a half day, I haven't yet visualized to eat or drink or gaze at Yuel in a miniskirt in the bar.

It is a possibility.

"That's true, it might be possible!" (Shiki)

As there won't be any noble-sama's coming to this bar which is aimed at the masses, the customers are mostly adventurers and laborers.

There might be demand.



After taking care of talking to the master of the bar to have a trial run, I easily received permission to open the healing business stall in a corner of the bar.

Even if it is a bar, they still will warmly welcome something that attracts customers. At a round table with a billboard, I prepared a partition resembling curtains.

Getting ready the obtained curtain is necessary for the medical treatment

It is not necessary for the negotiations.

You never know when such a customer like Ruruka comes along.

As the healing business stall is authorized by the bar now, I suspect there won't be any customers coming who will involve the bar in a weird situation. But still, that way of compensation is a bit too tempting for the eyes.

Since I declared it to be necessary, it is necessary.

Chapter 7: Consultation

A few days have passed since I was given the space for medical treatment in the bar.

Throughout the morning we searched for a treasure chest on the 4th floor. In the afternoon I got drunk while gazing at the smiling Yuel in her flashy miniskirt.

While I was at it, I healed 1 or 2 customers per hour who came for medical treatment.

You could say that the Healing Business Stall in the bar was a hit.

Or to say the least, there is no demerit in it for me.

While always eating and drinking at the usual bar in the same way, all I had to do was to appropriately use some healing magic.

Doing nothing more than that yielded me an income of several hundred Zeni at once.

Furthermore, it was a good kickback for the bar as well.

Although there are many customers, I didn't have to take care of the venue portion and labor cost. I probably even yielded more profit than some worthless medical institution around here.

For example Eris' place, huh?

Moreover, Man AB what were they called again?

Ah, Eight and Geyser.

It seems they announced the completion of the Healing Business Stall in the bar to their adventurer companions.

If the effectiveness further spreads, I am sure there will be even more profit.

Above all, the location of the bar is excellent.

The patients, who would be so seriously injured that I would need to use Ex Heal, don't come here.

If the degree of damage due to the labyrinth exploration is so heavy that they

need immediate medical treatment, they will go to the medical treatment place of the adventurer's guild to get healed as a standard.

Even if an ordinary citizen becomes seriously ill or sustains a critical wound, they won't consider such things as going to a bar with something like a healing place to have it taken care of.

Usually you can expect them to be taken to a big medical institution with proper hospitalization equipment.

In other words, I am doing fine.

I am doing extremely well.

Although it is going well.

For the time being, there is only one urgent problem that hasn't been resolved yet.

This unsettled problem might potentially cause great trouble.

However, I can't speak loudly or cry about it either.

As everybody might have this problem potentially, for now, I am just barely keeping the precarious balance in this situation I have been placed at.

Something that mustn't be talked about, must be kept secret after all.

I mustn't let my libido spill out.

To put things bluntly, there are no means to reduce my sexual desire.

It might be a stupid matter.

It might be a very stupid matter.

But, just because of such reason not resolving it is no good.

In the morning, at the time I suddenly woke up.

There was a tent swelling on the surface of the thin futon. Yuel-san intently stared at it with a look as if she wanted to bite into it.

A sense of impending crisis ran through me.

It is wrong.

As it is, it is wrong.

As it is, it is absolutely wrong, is what I thought.

Because she is my slave, because she is still too young, that's certainly why.

But, sleeping together with a girl on the same bed I don't intend to make a move on, that's a mistake in the first place.

Therefore, I tried to divide the room.

Yuel looked at me with a facial expression which was filled with sadness and close to sobbing.

For me it was impossible.

After that I wondered whether it was fine as long as it was the same room and so I tried to choose a double room.

Yuel's facial expression got even more depressed, she tightly bit her lower lip and large droplets of tears rose at the corners of her eyes.

And then her hand firmly grasped the hem of my clothes as she weakly trembled.

For me it was absolutely impossible.

Considering the circumstances, there is nothing else left but to deal with my libido issue one way or the other already.

However, Yuel is always together with me.

During the labyrinth exploration, during meal times, and we use the same bed, too.

Also, going to an adult shop, there hasn't much time passed since she became alone.

And telling Yuel to wait for me a little bit so I can head out from the inn, her facial expression becomes, what do you call it ... like an abandoned puppy.

Likewise, there is no one else I could consult about this matter with.

It has been a little more than 3 months since I came to this world.

However, I have been a live-in employee at Eris' medical institution all the

time until recently.

I have no male friends.

Although daringly meeting a woman for consultation is possible, it would just cause even more problems and furthermore enlarge this whole matter.

How typical of my character.

It is already hopeless.

Dead End —



.....

Ah, no, I was.

Which reminds me, I have male friends.

That's right. Let's try and consult with them.



For this reason, I head to the bar.

I dragged Man AB to the male toilet, also known as Eight and Geyser.

“Uhahaha! Well Shiki, isn't it the easiest solution to eat up the sweet Yuel-chan then? Certainly, she is still a bit small and has no breasts, but don't you react in any ways to such a level of cuteness?” (Geyser)

Was Geyser's opinion.

“No, Geyser, you have to consider why Shiki came to us for consultation. He doesn't want to make a move on Yuel-chan, I think he wants to resolve this situation without having his actions exposed, don't you think?” (Eight)

And that was Eight.

Somehow I came to understand their characters by now.

Anyway, Geyser is a baka and Eight is relatively composed.

Eight's way of speaking has a subtle feeling of courtliness.

Although only a small amount, you can sense his intelligence.

“As Eight said. I don’t have any intention to make a move on Yuel. Rather, in order to not make a move on her, I am looking for a way to resolve this.” (Shiki)

“How troublesome, ah, since we are already in the toilet, just get your relief properly.” (Geyser)

Geyser said while swinging his clasped hand up and down.

Please stop it.

Please stop these movements.

It isn’t a laughing matter if Geyser-whatever-his-full-name-is does such a thing.

I want to throw up.

“A-Also, th-the smell. Yuel knows it too well to conceal it. This isn’t a place I am able to immediately go and wash my body. I’m afraid that she will notice it. Isn’t there some better method?” (Shiki)

Yuel often buries her face in the vicinity of my abdomen.

Recently when I caress Yuel she is already in a state of embracing me, I can’t think of anything else but being clingy with such a degree.

Furthermore, she probably sniffs my smell.

Is she a dog?

An adorable pet is cute, but.

However, as I went to the toilet with such an intention I didn’t suffer a you-want-to-do-that gaze either.

“There is a way. A good method.” (Eight)

It was Eight.

Although I thought it was the end, there seems to be a way.

As expected of Eight.

From his facial expression and his behavior I got a feeling of overflowing intelligence and dignity.

He is a man you can rely on.

Come to think of it, the wisdom of Eight, I sense that it resembles something.

“Really?! Please, teach me !” (Shiki)

“You can use the slime drop ‘slime jelly’ on the 7th floor of the labyrinth.”
(Eight)

Slime jelly.

I also know of it.

I frequently happen to see something processed into powder being sold at foodstuff shops.

It is mainly used similar to potato starch.

It is different from potato starch though, since the quite bad smell vanishes once used together with meat, I thought it would be used to decrease the time used for preparations.

“Slime jelly? That’s, eto, that, right? It is used to in order to increase the thickness of cooking.” (Geyser)

“Ah, Geyser is in the brothel faction, so you don’t know, huh? At the time when it drops, the slime jelly mucus is an approximately 20 centimeter long, soft, transparent lump. That is processed and used then.” (Eight)

I began to see the whole picture.

In other words, it’s that.

That red and white stretchable and grow-able, so far as even famous, down there. Although I guess you should say it is used in a similar way.

That means, slime jelly X.

“But, in that case I can clear the problem of smell, don’t you agree?” (Shiki)

Even if I have or haven’t a tool, it will have no significance if I can’t solve this.

“No, there is no problem. You didn’t realise yet why slime jelly is used in cooking, did you? If you use it in cooking, it will remove the bad smell of meat. But have you ever eaten uncooked slime jelly?” (Eight)

Now that he mentioned it, I don’t feel like I did.

Even if you make *ankake* or soup, you usually heat it up. (T/N: *ankake is food covered in thick starchy sauce*)

Even if you process inferior meat, you will always cook it afterwards.

“Raw slime jelly mucus, not only meat, but all kind of smell it comes in contact with will be adsorbed. Since it is fairly weak to heat, applying heat on it will immediately kill this disposition, but. Things like high class *ryoutei*, which are particular about the taste of ingredients, definitely won’t use slime jelly at all.” (Eight) (T/N: *ryoutei is a traditional Japanese restaurant*)

Whatever.

That being the case, it might work.

Even so, you are well-informed.

Probably, you used it yourself.

You said Geyser belongs to the brothel faction, huh?

Then, to what faction do you belong?

“There is one more thing. If you spill water on the slime jelly mass, it becomes a slippery pleasant feeling. I can say with confidence that it has a superb texture. And it doesn’t disappear by dissolving if you add a large quantity of water. In case of the intelligent you, you understand, don’t you?” (Eight)

It is the style of the toilet flush of this city.

To sum it up, that’s the situation.

“Ah! Thank you very much, Eight. You are my soulmate!!” (Shiki)

“Aren’t you my lifesaver? This much is a trivial matter.” (Eight)

I felt something hot gathering in the corners of my eyes.

Eight, we are buddies.

Only this can be called camaraderie.

For the first time after coming to this other world, I am truly grateful to have such a friend as you.

Geyser? I don’t know that baka!

“But, there is only one problem...” (Eight)

Problem?

Although there didn't seem to be a problem when I listened to his story.

“Generally there is no distribution of the slime jelly mass. From the adventurer's guild it is directly sold to merchants and then it is processed into powder in a batch. In other words, there is no other way but to dive into the labyrinth and procure some by yourself.” (Eight)

You, what?!

Such a crisis.

No, wait.

Calm down.

“Normally, couldn't I just buy it from a adventurer's guild staff member with profit?” (Shiki)

“You really want to say that in front of those beautiful reception women of the adventurer's guild? I want to buy such a thing like slime jelly mass, so I can use the slime jelly mass afterwards for indecent acts... do you want to make an announcement like that?” (Eight)

Yare yare, Eight said with an amazed expression.

I tried to imagine it.

I am at the usual guild purchase counter, the girl with the cut and evened up at the back hair dyed brown and the supposedly tufty dog ears on top of her head.

Her age is around 20, huh?

With her bright, round and cute eyes open and her refreshing business smile.

I guess she works there for around 2 or 3 years as beginner?

The freshness of an innocent nature having already vanished, just right at the time when she becomes more confident in her work experience.

I greet her.

At first, she gives a gentle smile as she deals with me.

However, in the moment she hears my request, that smile freezes and becomes cramped.

Not being able to conceal her scorn, she is in conflict with her high business sense.

While also cursing at me in her mind, she faces me with a slightly stiffened smile.

Within her mind being reluctant, she decides to hand over the slime jelly to me.

And the moment he receives the slime jelly, that man tightly grasps the woman's hand.

I watch intently from the front at the face of her as she experiences this surprise and slowly lowers her gaze downwards, while raising the corners of her mouth like a thresher shark.

Tearing off her mask of a receptionist's smile, pure repugnance becomes exposed on her facial expression.

Embracing my own body in order to protect it, I pull back from the reception woman by reflex.

Somehow, I got slightly aroused.

Well.

That's no good.

That's hopeless.

Calm down.

There is no way that it will be good to drop until the rumored bottom of the earth so I can surrender myself to a pleasant feeling for a short while.

I properly understand that.

Buying it is no good.

In other words, there is no other way but for me to get down to the 7th floor

of the labyrinth.

However, we are still at the 4th floor of the labyrinth.

“Shit! Just when I reached this point with great pains! It is no good, huh! Don’t I have any choice but to give up?!” (Shiki)

What a situation!

Reaching the 7th floor of the labyrinth will still take a number of days.

Will I be able to endure it or will I snap?

Assuming I would need to hold on for a few days until the 7th floor, my libido is already at its limit.

Before me, who drowns in grief, a hand is presented.

It is Eight’s hand.

“Shiki, don’t grieve so much. I thought I told you that I am your friend, didn’t I?” (Eight)

And then, there was a slime jelly grasped in that hand.

“Y-You will let me have it?” (Shiki)

“Ah, of course” (Eight)

Eight smiled refreshingly.

That smile was excessively radiant.

For me it was as though I experienced a sensation similar to being tinged with a mild spring sun.

Just now I understood Eight’s feeling slightly as he hung on to receive healing magic cast on him in the labyrinth.

A single light pierced through the gloomy darkness of despair.

I feel like the world is full of light.

Now I was truly saved by Eight.

“Eight! Eight!!” (Shiki)

Thank you very much.

I have really obtained an excellent friend.

Being saved by Eight, it is truly pleasant.

The red light streaming in from the window was from the beautiful sunset marking the end of the day.

Raising my face in one deep breath, fresh air entered my lungs filling them up.

Looking at the world outside the window, it was a scenery totally different from my birthplace but still apparently held a little quantity of nostalgia.

But, while holding onto the jiggling and trembling slime jelly I pondered.

It is really great for me to have come to this other world.

Chapter 8: Legend: Victim A, waitress of the bar. + α

After handing me the slime jelly, we drank for a bit. Then Eight and Geyser left saying "We'll go back first".

Although I'll have to suffer for a little bit, I can't bring myself to use it just yet. The main reason being that I can't seem to get the image of Geyser using it out of my mind. Such an unpleasant image is difficult to forget easily.

Quelling my libido is an important issue, however I feel like using this is lowering my quality as a man and a human being.

Unfortunately, the number of times I can use it is equal to the number I got from Eight. When should I use it? I should think carefully about that.

I return to the table and glance around my surroundings. My eyes meet with Yuel who returns a pleasant smile as usual. Looking at her, it seems she's recently become a little plump from eating too much everyday. Lovely round eyes, faint blushing cheeks, soft full lips. Whilst lowering my gaze, a childlike modest bulge lifts up her shirt slightly.

Yuel tries to reach for dish in the centre of the table, her body is made to incline forward. Due to gravity, her neckline is slowly exposed. The scruff of her neck, her collarbone. Her gentle swelling —

Immediately, I cover my face with my hands.

What was I just about to see? was what I thought.

I certainly wanted to put that image of Geyser out of my mind. I'd like to overwrite it with a different image. I also want to use the slime jelly.

As for what I'm looking at now. It's Yuel. The young dark elf girl who adores me. I'm a useless person, a bad person.

I feel a strong sense of self-hatred. If I relaxed my mind for even a second, I knew my libido would take over.

I'll resist.

I know, I'll try focusing on eating.

I examine the food diligently, then gently place it into my mouth. The smell passes through my nose as the taste spreads throughout my mouth. The texture of the food is examined by my tongue, the sound the food makes as it is eaten is examined by my ears. All five senses are used to fully immerse myself in the meal. Concentrating on this meal seems to work well as a diversion.

In the centre of the table, there seems to be a large piece of meat resting on a large plate. I take some from the large plate and put it onto my small plate, carrying it to my mouth. It is light and simple, it tastes like chicken. Actually, it tastes slightly different to chicken, it has more depth. After finishing what was on my small plate, I was interested in it. I wonder what meat it is.

"Yuel, what meat is this?"

"It's soft-shelled turtle"

"Tsu!! Why!?" *(TLN: Soft-shelled turtles are said to increase libido/lust/arousal)*

Why? Why did they choose a soft-shelled turtle? Are those turtles different in this world?

"Well, because Geyser recommended it. Was it useless?"

So it was because of that idiot. You shouldn't listen to the words of an idiot like Geyser. Because I raised such a loud cry, Yuel seems to be slightly frightened.

"No it's not useless. It's not useless at all. Yuel didn't do anything wrong"

"Master?"

Yuel utters with her usual voice. A childlike soprano, much like the sound of ringing bells. However to me, her voice sounds very sweet, more so than pancakes layered with plenty of honey. Although Yuel was on the other side of the table, her voice sounded like a gentle whisper in my ear.

"Don't worry about it"

Judging by my current libido, this could be bad. Also, Geyser is bad. My instincts seem to be eroding my sense of reasoning. I don't know what effect

the soft-shelled turtle of this world has, but my body feels hot for some reason. This shouldn't be on the level of a placebo. Dangerous. *(TLN: He's saying in his previous world the turtle is used to increase libido, so he might be experiencing a placebo effect as he expects it to happen. However, he now realises this is not the case and it is real)*

I'd like to run to the restroom right now, however the slime jelly can't be used yet.

It's because I'm with Yuel. If I use it right now, she'll definitely be the image in my brain.

I can't allow that. In my mind she is innocent and cute, I don't want to smear that image.

It's non-negotiable.

I remove Yuel from my line of sight and look around restlessly.

That waitresses miniskirt is fluttering. I'm shaking.

She was wearing a buttoned shirt, with a frilly collar. A corset was covering the bottom of her chest to her hips. Due to the corset, her chest was pressed up. Surely it's ok to call them milk bags now? She seemed to be around 17 years old, with a cute youthful face.

Her long, blonde hair seemed to shine every time she went around a table to fetch an order.

She doesn't seem to be very good at her work. She often gets the orders wrong and has to apologise to the customers.

The hem of her miniskirt rises every time she bows down and says "I'm sorry!". Her thighs are as white as snow. However, due to the interference from the thighs, the thin cloth is not visible. Even when I'm absolutely sure I'm about to see it, it doesn't appear.

Still not enough. The images I'm seeing aren't profound enough to erase my images of Yuel, thus allowing me to use the slime jelly.

I stare intently at the waitress who is currently apologising to a customer.

Of course, Yuel is not aware of this. I held my hands just above my eyes, so

that my line of vision can't be seen. I wrinkle my eyebrows, giving the atmosphere of someone in deep thought.

Appear....won't appear.....appear.....won't appear....appear...

Whilst I was looking at the hem of her skirt, how much time has passed? Not much, the angle of the sun shining through the windows hasn't really changed much. Barely any time has passed. My impatience seems to be making time appear to be moving much slower.

Whether it will appear or not, I keep waiting for the decisive moment.

And that moment came. It was magnificent.

Falling out of the hands of a drunk man, a tankard rolled on the floor. This man is the true MVP.

Facing that direction, the waitress slowly walked towards it. The tankard is between me and the waitress.

As she is only one step away from the tankard, some customers call out to her. This is the second contributor. *(TLN: They both contributed to the event that's about to happen)*

The waitress turns to face the call and starts walking.

As she was walking, her right foot got caught on the tankard.

Under the pressure from the waitress, the tankard span diagonally, spinning the waitress a full 180 degrees.

"Kyaaaa!!!"

She loses her balance and starts to fall.

Provocative black.

The black underwear from the girl still seems to leave an impression of childishness.

As she had spread out her hands to protect herself from the fall, her rear end was currently in the air. Her legs are completely wide open, there's no way to hide it.

"Hyuaaa!"

The waitress's face is instantly dyed red as she closes her legs forcefully.

But it's already too late. That vivid black colour has already been branded into my retinas.

I speak to the waitress whilst stepping forward "Are you okay?". Just looking at her there doesn't seem to be any injury, just pain.

Although I'm speaking directly to her, I couldn't help eyeing her red dyed face. It feels refreshing, my face reveals a smile that has no secret intentions behind it at all.

"Because it was done without permission, you do not need to pay me"

"Thank you very much"

She probably has no idea how much my heart is spinning because of those few words. So I try and make an effort, offering my hand to the red faced girl. She takes my "Right hand" nervously. I can feel the warmth from her hand as a moist texture is transmitted. I use a slight amount of force to pull her up.

As she stands up she seems unsteady on her legs, so I use my hand on her lower back to support her.

The feeling of tender meat.

From my touch, her body turned stiff for a moment.

Even if she shows a complicated expression, she didn't seem to reject it.

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

I release my hold immediately and take some distance from the waitress. She opens her eyes in surprise, from her facial expressions she seems to completely believe I touched it by chance. It's already been ten minutes. Don't make a mistake when knowing when to quit.

"Oh no, thank you very much"

She doesn't seem to doubt my actions as she says so. It looks like I've been appreciated, I'd also like to extend my hand and thank you. Should I say, thank you for the meal?

In the end I merely say "Try to be more careful next time" in my most gentlest

tone possible.

After a while I return to the table and put Yuel on my knees. It was by her request. It's quite rare to see her expressing intimacy in public.

From this location, her head becomes easier to stroke. Also, her ass has become pretty plump recently, it's going *punipuni* on my lap. She also seems to be moving around a lot, it must be uncomfortable.

I was interested about whether or not this was the case, so I turned my head to look at Yuel's face and I instantly flushed red from ear to ear.

I have a bad feeling about this.

Because of her constant shifting around, a pleasant sensation is coming from between my thighs.

I have a bad feeling about this.

When I look on the table, the soft-shelled turtle had been completely picked clean.

This is bad. I shouldn't let Yuel sit on my knees any longer.

— Was what I would say if it was the usual me.

I now have the slime jelly.

Even though Yuel is sticking to me a lot, I can calm my heart.

I can defeat Yuel.

And it's all thanks to Eight and this slime jelly.

Chapter 9: Comforting by Petting

Merhatz Labyrinth, 5th floor. Aiming for the 7th floor where the slimes are, Yuel and I are advancing through the labyrinth all fired up.

And, as we approach the center of the 5th floor—

"Master!"

"Woah, close one!"

I dodge as Yuel cries out.

The monster on the 5th floor, Big Chick. The chicken monster, which is about as tall as the distance from an adult's waist to their chest, gives us our first tough fight.

There are four of them. At the adventurers' guild, I heard that a thrust from their large beak can easily pierce flesh, and that their charge is powerful enough that we need to watch out for it.

Right, that charge is troublesome. Maybe because they're chickens that can't fly, they're quick on their feet. Moreover, they don't just target Yuel who's right in front of them, they also come plunging towards me, on standby in the rear. It's a relief that they move in a straight line, but either way I have to choose between taking evasive action or defending. If I don't, I'll become a tasty snack for their beaks.

By the way, I don't even consider attacking. Everyone has their specialty. Fighting is Yuel's. And with my novice skills, trying to attack would likely just get me counterattacked. I can just evade or endure until Yuel comes to my rescue.

Is it finally my mace's turn? — I thought about it, but my opponent attacks by putting all its body weight behind its charge. Although a Big Chick's height is only from my waist to my chest, I'm not quite sure whether or not I'll be able to parry it. If I manage to stop its body but then I get pecked by its beak, the scene will be hard to look at. Rather, I'll lose my eyes entirely. Too dangerous.

Even if I try to parry, there's a feeling like "how exactly do I do that?". Evading is faster.

Which is to say, I'm running. I'm keeping a tight grip on my mace just in case, but I'm just dodging to the left or right when a Big Chick comes charging. If I keep a careful watch, avoiding their linear charge isn't so difficult. However, this is my first face-to-face battle with monsters, so I end up getting a little nervous. My excessively fleet-footed chicken opponents have me feeling chicken.

I take evasive action once again, but the Big Chick's charge slightly grazes me. There isn't much damage, but I lose my balance and stumble.

"Ahhhhh!!"

Yuel sees that and shrieks.

By the time I regain my posture, Yuel has apparently already defeated the other three. She turns to face the Big Chick that rammed me and runs toward it in a rage. Yuel slices open the Big Chick's neck, stabs its breast with a knife, then thrusts two knives through its head from both sides.

How thorough. It's clearly overkill. Besides, the knives look damaged. Yuel-san is a little scary.

Then the Big Chick turns into particles of light and vanishes. However, Yuel doesn't come over to me. Even though usually she rushes over with a "Master, I did it!" feeling. She's looking down and not moving.

When I walk over to her instead, a tiny pool of tears appears at her feet. Still hanging her head, Yuel begins to speak.

"I'm so sorry... even though I said... I would protect Master with my life. I... wasn't able... to protect you."

Oh yeah, I'm pretty sure she said something like that on the first day. It'll be troublesome if she really offers me her life or something because she didn't protect me, though. And besides, I'm not injured.

"No, Yuel has protected me plenty. Even this time, it just barely grazed me."

"But... but I decided... to protect Master..."

Somehow, it looks like that Big Chick ended up trampling Yuel's pride. It's not

like Yuel could stop four charging monsters all by herself anyway, though. In Shogi terms, that would be like one piece saving the king from four lances that were aiming at him. Thinking of it that way, Yuel is already plenty excellent for pulling aggro on three of them.

Besides, you could say it's my fault for rushing into the 5th floor because I wanted Slime Jelly, and for not being able to avoid an attack of that degree. If I end up making Yuel cry any more than this, my guilt is going to balloon out of control.

Ahh, what should I do. Yuel is pressing her head into her hands and crying. It hurts my heart. Really hurts. I want Yuel to smile. She rushes over with a smile, and I pat her head. I cast healing magic, and she gives me a look of reverence. I want our relationship to continue like that the whole time.

And yet, this is Yuel's own problem. Yuel told me she'd protect me, and she didn't. I'm sure that's where the problem lies. But it's already over. The past can't be changed. Nothing can be done about it. When you lose self-confidence, the only way to get it back is with your own power, through your own actions. No matter how much I twist my words or pat her head, something tells me this isn't a problem I can do anything about.

Well, as for whether I'm going to pat her head or not, I'm still going to.

And no skillful words that would clear up Yuel's heart are coming to mind, so petting her head is about all I can do. I'm bad at comforting people. At best, I can only comfort my own "Shiki Jr."

"Yuel."

When I call her name, Yuel's body shivers with a jolt. This condition is serious. My injury is a scratch. I mean, a wound isn't even forming.

All I can do is pet her, but even if it's just a little, I wonder if I can clear up her feelings?

I place my hand on Yuel's head. However, she makes no movement to nuzzle her head against it like she usually does. Is it because she's discouraged? Maybe she's thinking something like "I don't deserve to be petted". Seems like it. I call and she responds, I pet her head and she smiles, that kind of communication

was fun, though.

From the center of her head, I slowly, deliberately run my hand down the gentle lines of her head. From my experience so far, compared to having the surface of her hair gently brushed, Yuel probably prefers being thoroughly stroked, to the point that the heat of my palm is transmitted to her scalp. Somehow I get the impression that the latter gives Yuel a happier expression, and given her age and her circumstances as a slave, she seems starved for the warmth of physical affection.

Holding my left hand on Yuel's back, I slowly, steadily move my right hand up and down. However, Yuel's expression is still dark. Does that mean this isn't enough to bring back her smile?

Continuing to pet her with my right hand, I lift up my left hand. Now that it's free, I put it on her drooping elf ear. They're usually pointing straight out perkily. Continuing to observe Yuel's expression, I search for her pleasure points as I slowly rub my fingers into her soft ears.

"Ffh...nnh..."



A shallow sigh leaks out. It's here.

I focus on rubbing the spot that made Yuel react with my left hand, and match it by intensifying the strokes with my right hand.

"Mmmmh..."

I continue rubbing Yuel's head to the point that a hint of sweat forms on her brow, then switch my hands so I can firmly massage her right ear.

Yuel flushes slightly, and the sadness visibly fades from her expression. Although it doesn't seem to be enough to recover that bashful smile of hers.

I temporarily stop petting her head, and this time I massage both of her ears simultaneously. I tightly squeeze the cartilage of her elf ears which are just a bit softer than human ears, gently tickle their inner sides, tenderly wrap them up in order to transmit the heat from my palms, and softly stretch their pointed tips.

"Fwa....mmh....yah...aaah..."

I continue rubbing her ears. I keep rubbing, but.

Somehow I get the feeling that Yuel's expression is different from normal. This is, how do I put it?

Rather than calling it bashful, "melted" would be more accurate.

Not this. This is different. This isn't the expression I wanted to see on Yuel. I wanted a more, I don't know, heartwarming smile. Not this syrupy expression that's overflowing with immorality. That reminds me, this right hand that's currently rubbing Yuel was used in the toilet yesterday to—

No don't. Don't think about it.

That's it, I get the feeling I'm making a mistake.

I lift both hands to stop for a moment.

"Ah..."

Yuel makes a saddened voice and her expression darkens again.

I can tell from a glance. Surely, this expression is "anxiety".

On the first day, I didn't lay a hand on Yuel's body, and told her that I bought

her since she could use Dagger Arts. Precisely because of that, Yuel would seek to establish her worth as a slave in battle. And her pride over being useful in battle was just destroyed.

That expression of Yuel's is surely the very same as a child who's been abandoned by their parents.

When I removed my hands from her ears, she felt "anxiety".

That adorable Yuel. She's making such a heartbroken face.

Just looking at it makes me feel like my chest is tightening.

I can't do it.

It's too unpleasant. I can't stop anymore.

Helplessly, I return my hands to both of Yuel's ears.

"Nnh..."

Ohh. She's a little bashful. It wasn't a mistake after all? This is the moment where all my effort pays off. Yuel lovingly caresses my hands with her fingers as I rub her ears. It's back. Yuel's assertiveness is back. Keep going.

Squatting in front of Yuel, I place both hands on her cheeks while gazing at her expression. I brush the moisture out of the corners of her eyes with my thumbs. I softly trace the skin under her eyes, gently stretching it. I slowly knead her cheeks along the lines of her cheekbones.

"Mmmh..."

The blush on Yuel's cheeks intensifies, but she wraps her hands over mine. She's becoming proactive. Which means that her feelings of "I don't deserve to be petted" have gone away at this point.

I was right. I wasn't making a mistake.

While my thumbs are vigorously rubbing her cheeks, I don't let my other fingers remain idle. I hold Yuel's jawline steady with my pinky and ring fingers, and tickle the interior of her ears with my index and middle fingers.

"Hi...ah...nnuh..."

Yuel trembles with a jolt. As I keep rubbing her cheeks like that—

Suddenly, a shadow appears behind Yuel's back.

A monster has come.

Well, if we're spending this much time in the labyrinth, I suppose it's only natural.

"Yuel, there's a Big Chick."

Yuel's face instantly switches to a tense expression. No, rather than tense, perhaps "angry over being interrupted" would be more accurate.

Drawing her knife, she plunges directly towards the Big Chick's charge on a collision course. Just before colliding, she nimbly sidesteps the Big Chick like a matador. And as she evades, she swings her knife towards its neck. Spurting blood, the Big Chick topples over as it runs.

Yuel collects its drop and comes close, as if begging for a continuation of earlier. She looks slightly reserved, but mixed in with that expression is a hint of anticipation. I pet her, of course.

Once I pet Yuel, she's okay. She has recovered. I guess in the end, she's still a child. All that's left is to keep this up until there's not a shred of reservation left on her face.

"It's about time we head back, Yuel."

"Yes, Master!"

Upon my words, Yuel makes a bashful smile and gives me an enthusiastic response.

We return to the city and buy equipment.

Yuel told me that she wants throwing knives. According to Yuel, if she has a bunch of throwing knives, she may be able to protect me next time.

That reminds me, earlier I'm pretty sure she defeated a Goblin with a knife throw. Is it a benefit of her skill? There was quite a lot of power to it. Besides, if she can protect me the next time we face off against 4 Big Chicks again, perhaps she'll gain some confidence as well. That should lead to her smiling face. If having throwing knives means she'll be able to do that, then how can I not buy them?

Fortunately, thanks to my dual sources of income from adventuring and healing, there's enough in my wallet to spare.

For Yuel, I buy four knives for throwing, and two that are slightly longer than the ones she currently has, and supposedly made by the disciple of a highly practical master craftsman. I end up coming back practically penniless, but with this, Yuel will be fine even if multiple enemies show up.

The day that Yuel becomes a knife artillery may not be far off.

Chapter 10: Ruruka and the Inn

"Hey, wanna go into the labyrinth with me tomorrow?"

We go directly from the weaponsmith to the tavern, and as we're having a meal, Ruruka comes over to our table and says that. Then she cheekily sits down and starts taking food from our platter and even ordering additional alcohol. Seems like she's by herself today.

"Wait, didn't you tell me I couldn't join you or whatever? Besides, that flat-chest would totally hate it."

Perhaps, just maybe, this is headhunting? Her objective isn't me, but Yuel. Did she come to poach my cute, excellent, lovely Yuel-san?

"...You better not say that in front of that girl, okay? She's really sensitive about that. Err, didn't I also say that if I didn't have a party I'd want to enter the labyrinth with you? Fran's in poor health, so for the next few days, we're just taking a little break from party exploration."

Yeah, come to think of it she did say that too, huh. I get it. So it's okay to go with Ruruka individually on one of her days off? A so-called temporary party. And I do feel a little concerned about our combat potential, so maybe I should go ahead and test how far we can get with three people?

"Ahh, that so? But Fran's in poor health, no? Can't you do something for her? If that brat asks me personally, it's not like I won't heal her?"

"A-Ahh,ahaha. Err, it's not like that, so don't worry about it. She'll be fine, alright?"

What's with that, she's being evasive.

"Poor health". "It's not like that". "The next few days". "Taking a little break". "Don't worry, she'll be fine".

Ahh. The corners of my mouth spontaneously curl up. I see, there are days like that occasionally, aren't there. It's a girl thing. That thing where about once a month, their health becomes poor.

I see, so it started today?

I wonder how long a cycle lasts? Usually about a month or so?

Yeah, I'm starting to feel like calling out to her a month from now with "That time of the month, huh?". At first, Fran wouldn't understand what I meant and stare blankly at me. But seeing my smug grin, she'd realize what I meant, and be so confused over why I know, and ashamed that I found out. I wanna take a look at her expression, soaked with disgust at me for bringing it up.

Right, if I run into Fran today or tomorrow, why don't I try asking her about her period? Surely, seeing Fran's infuriated expression with those twin drills raging up to the sky would be well worth it.

"Don't do anything to make her too angry, okaaay? That girl really hates things like that."

Ruruka sighs and says that. Did she guess my thoughts just from my expression? She knows me well, doesn't she.

Well, in the end maybe I won't actually do it. She's one of Ruruka's party members and all. If I end up saying it, Ruruka would understandably hate me. I'd like to think that Ruruka has a relatively tolerant personality, but that doesn't extend to someone who offends her party members. Wait, since it's Fran we're talking about, she's liable to call the guards or blast me with magic or something. She's known to be uptight and all. Yeah, that would be unwise.

But if I do happen to run into Fran, I may end up saying something. If she takes a nasty attitude like "I despise you", I'll naturally want to dye that expression of hers with shame. It wouldn't be seen as taking the first swing anymore.

"Hey, Shiki, I wanna stay at the same inn as you. You don't mind, right?"

On our way out of the tavern, Ruruka brings up an idea like that.

Is it *that*

? That "I'm drunk, could you escort me back?" one. Have I finally reached my popular age? Her face is faintly flushed too. Perhaps she wants me to take her back to my place. Surely, this is what you'd call a come-hither look. To think,

suddenly going straight to bed without dating. How assertive. Has she always been this aggressive? No, at most it's been on the level where she jiggles her clothed breasts, presses them against me, and lets me touch them for just a moment. Plus, that was in exchange for a treatment fee.

I guess my popular time has come after all. Making Ruruka be this proactive, what a... what a sinful man I am. Whoops, I ended up letting a grin show on my face. Gotta be careful.

"Ah, of course I don't mean it like that, just that it's bothersome to arrange a meetup, so why not use the same inn? Separate rooms, obviously."

Ah, it was a misunderstanding? Of course. And her face is reddened because she was drinking alcohol, naturally. I'm a bit annoyed at myself for getting my hopes up. And extremely disappointed. Maybe I should have a drink too and clear my head a little. Well, since Yuel is there, even if we shared the same room and the same bed, nothing would actually happen, though.

"Speaking of that, do you and Yuel-chan sleep in the same room?"

I'm interested in what her intentions are, asking me that question. Is she getting jealous over the intimate relationship between me and Yuel? Or else is she trying to figure out whether I'm a lolicon or something? I'd like to know.

"Yeah, that's right. Don't wanna waste money or anything."

The truth is that Yuel was against being separated, but there's no need to mention that.

"Master always lets me sleep in the same bed with him."

Yuel-san, there's no need to mention that either.

When she hears what Yuel says, Ruruka stares intently at my face. A serious expression, like she's searching for the truth.

Yeah, I knew it, she suspected me of being a lolicon.

I must not avert my eyes. Surely, if I avert my eyes here, I'll be treated as a lolicon in Ruruka's mind. If that happens, Ruruka may draw back and stop giving me negotiation time service. No, far from that, it's not unthinkable that she could entirely stop looking me in the eyes and never speak to me again. For

women, who give birth to children, lolicons would likely be shunned to that degree.

That's not it. I really haven't made a move on her.

I stare back at Ruruka with an exceedingly earnest expression.

"...I'm gonna go have them change my room to the one next to Shiki's after all, kay?"

I wonder if that's to make sure there are no strange sounds or voices in the middle of the night.

The walls of this cheap inn are thin. If you were to do this or that, the neighbors would notice it instantly.

Looks like she doesn't trust me. Even though I'm always going out of my way not to lay a hand on Yuel. Somehow this feels just a little bit unreasonable.

How exactly should I vent these feelings?

"Nnh... haaahh... how does it feel, Masteerrr?"

In the mood to try her hardest, Yuel is stimulating a part of me that feels good. The place she's touching gradually grows hot and stretches out, giving me an intense feeling of pleasure.

"Yeah, so good. Yuel is the best. It feels incredible."

Yuel seems to be having a tough time. Besides, I won't say this out loud, but her techniques aren't that skilled. But it's her first time, so I suppose that can't be helped. I'm fine with that, though. I'm sure that the fact that Yuel is doing it for me is why it feels this good.

"Hahh...gh...fuhhh... it's hurting me, nh, but I'll do my best!"

As Yuel touches my stiff meat, although she lets out a pained voice, she continues stimulating me with all her might. Is it painful? Perhaps this is too intense for the 12-year-old Yuel after all.

"Does it hurt? Don't push yourself, we can stop if you want?"

"No, nh, I, nh, I'll try my hardest for Masterrr."

So brave. Yuel continues to stimulate me with all her strength, to the point

that her sweat drips down onto my body.

Breathing roughly, leaking her voice, dripping sweat.

"H-Hold on! What are you doing to Yuel-chan!? You'd better not be laying a hand... on..."

And — along with a cry from Ruruka, the door to the room flings open.

Ruruka bursts into the room, observing the scene.

The scene of Yuel massaging my shoulders for me.

Just as planned.

"Hmm? What's the matter, Ruruka? You're all flustered. Something bothering you?"

"E-Err, umm, well."

It was on purpose, of course. I asked Yuel to massage my shoulders, and massaging shoulders with a child's strength is difficult. So that our voices would be audible from across the wall, with exaggerated feelings.

Even for Ruruka who initiated all sorts of things at the hospital, as expected, this misunderstanding must have embarrassed her. She's stammering as her face blushes. If I had to say which, Ruruka is the type who prefers to be on the offensive.

Rather than me sexually harassing her, I get the impression that it's more appealing the other way around. And when I fall for her tricks, she rips off some money from me.

This isn't an expression I see very often. She showed me something rare.

Even I'm not going to just let her get away with taking advantage of me all the time.

"What's wrong, you must have some reason to come bursting into my room all upset? Why don't you tell me?"

As Ruruka's face blushes, I glare at her scornfully.

You can't say it, *huh*. That's right, *huh*. There's no way you can say that you assumed we were doing indecent things, *huh*. It's embarrassing, *huh*.

Moreover, Yuel is wiggling her thumbs next to me, shaking out the pain in her fingers. All the more reason.

Ruruka is wearing an expression dyed with shame, as well as some thin pajamas. A [Henley shirt](#), and some shorts made of soft-looking material. No, are they [culottes](#)? Usually she dons shorts made of some thick denim-like fabric, but just changing the fabric gives it a completely different atmosphere. Enough to make me think that if I look from the back, her underwear lines would probably be visible through it.

I look her up and down, getting a full, thorough view. Pulled by gravity, the thin cloth slightly emphasizes the curves of her flesh. Her typically unseen expression makes a nice accent to it.

And yet Ruruka closes her eyes, takes a single deep sigh, and goes back to an exasperated expression. Ahh, it's already over, huh?

She must have realized that I prepared an intentional misunderstanding for her. As I thought, Ruruka knows me well. Besides, she switches gears quickly.

I thought she might get angry, but I haven't actually done anything. I merely had Yuel massage my shoulders, that's all.

Sure, I'm the one who told Yuel that I wanted her to massage my shoulders, and I did pick words that would be easy for Ruruka to misunderstand, but my voice was merely expressing my satisfied emotions from having my shoulders massaged by Yuel. I did flex my shoulders a little to create a situation where Yuel would have to put more force into massaging them, but Ruruka doesn't know that. There were no lies. The one who made an embarrassing misunderstanding was Ruruka herself. Precisely because of that, Ruruka is likely making an exasperated expression because there's nothing for her to get mad about.

I suppose you could call this payback. As for the fact that she suspected me of being a lolicon, with this, I'll consider us even.

That's what I've decided today after seeing Ruruka's figure in those thin pajamas, and that blushing face of hers.

Chapter 11: Being Concerned

"Ne~ Shiki, er, do you always do this?"

First floor of the labyrinth.

After defeating the Fang Rabbits, Ruruka asks me while I'm lightly petting Yuel who was retrieving the dropped items.

"That's the case, what's wrong?"

I carefully use my right hand to slowly stroke Yuel's hair and my left hand to tickle her chin.

Possibly unable to forget about the battle yesterday, although Yuel doesn't resist having her hair stroked, she doesn't hug me as tightly as she did in the past.

While I feel slightly unsatisfied about it, I still continue stroking the soft, silvery hair in front of me.

Ruruka shows a complicated expression but doesn't say anything further after watching this scene.

"No, it's nothing..."

She sounds somewhat dissatisfied.

As expected, I wonder if she thinks I'm a lolicon.

However, this is my "Job".

This skinship is for the sake of increasing Yuel's motivation.

There is no way I could stop doing it.

Besides, if I stop doing this, then all I will be doing is following behind the party.

My whole worth in this labyrinth is stroking Yuel.

Acting like a pimp, I praise Yuel, stroke her, encourage her and put in my best effort to make her motivated for the next battle.

At the same time, petting Yuel is also one of my joys in life.

The joyous feeling of being respected by Yuel.

It is just impossible to stop this.

After we complete the first floor and in the middle of the second floor, I understand the basic battle style of Ruruka.

Ruruka is a warrior who uses a one-handed sword and shield and fights by deflecting enemy attacks, evading and attacking when she sees an opening. From my observation, she can use shield skills and specializes in evading and attracting the attention of the enemy.

She throws small stones to attract and disrupt the attention of monsters trying to get behind her.

Although her attack does not seem strong, she is able to bring a sense of reliability to her teammates by drawing the attention of multiple enemies. This is the so-called shield user.

Thanks to Ruruka attracting the attention of the enemy, Yuel can focus on annihilating the enemy and we proceed through the dungeon more smoothly than usual.

We reach the fifth floor.

There are four giant birds in front of us.

Except for the presence of Ruruka, it is the same situation as yesterday.

The image of Yuel crying as she was unable to protect me flashes in my mind.

This is a good opportunity.

"Please wait a moment"

I stop Yuel and Ruruka the moment they are about to rush forward.

This is an opportunity for Yuel to regain her confidence.

"Ruruka, could you leave this battle to Yuel?"

To overcome her previous failure, she must redeem it with her own ability. Different from yesterday, she is carrying throwing knives with her now.

I believe the current Yuel can handle this situation.

"Uwa~, that's amazing"

The four giant birds fall to the ground after the small knives pierce through their throats.

This is the result of Yuel's throwing knives.

As expected, Yuel is definitely amazing.

The battle ended faster than normally fighting with a hand-held knife.

Even though the giant birds would only move in a straight line, it is still extremely difficult to accurately pierce the monster's throat 10 meters away using a small knife.

Although I am respected by Yuel, I felt that I am beginning to respect Yuel instead.

"I did it, Master!"

After Yuel retrieves the small knives and dropped items, she happily runs over and leaps into my chest with all her momentum.

It seems like she did not hold back.

Casting aside her previous gloomy face, Yuel's whole face is smiling widely.

Yuel overcame her past failure and regained her confidence.

Looking at the innocent Yuel being so happy, I am so pleased for her.

"Amazing, Yuel is so amazing!"

I gently hug Yuel who leaped into my chest and caress her head.

Yuel hugs my waist and rubs her head on my chest while sticking her body to me.

I use one hand to hug her back and the other hand to gently stroke Yuel's head.

I feel Yuel react to my stroking by rubbing her head against my hand.

Such a nostalgic feeling.

Such a nostalgic reaction.

Despite Yuel feeling depressed for only one day, I feel that it has been a long time since I saw such a reaction.

I feel extremely happy.

I wonder what kind of feeling this is.

Oh right, it feels like my cute daughter getting first place in her athletic meet.

I have this urge to praise her even more.

I want to fully express this joy.

More, I want to praise Yuel.

I will not do with only caressing her head like usual.

It won't do with only this.

Today is the day Yuel overcame her past, yes, today is such a memorable day.

I squat down, loop my hands behind Yuel's leg and back and carry Yuel.

A princess carry.



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Yuel lets out a surprised voice for a moment but immediately loops her hand over my head and rubs her head on my chest.

I let Yuel do as she pleases after she stabilizes her upper body while using my left arm to stabilize her lower body.

I caress Yuel's head with my freed right hand,
and lightly press Yuel's head into my chest further.

"Yuel is so amazing"

Praise her, stroke her, praise her, stroke her.

Yuel gives out a happy sound and rubs her head even more.

Just when I want to hug the head of such a cute Yuel —

"Wait a moment! This is strange, is it not!?"

All of a sudden, I hear Ruruka's voice.

Ruruka, whose face turned red, is looking over here with eyes wide open in surprise.

"What's wrong?"

I am only praising a hardworking child with some skinship.
I am not doing anything weird.

"E, eto, no, but, you won't do anything to Yuel-chan?..."

I didn't do anything weird.
I am just rewarding Yuel for her hard work with a princess carry and stroking her head.

There is nothing sexual about it as it is just skinskip between a parent and their child.

Or is the matter of not doing anything to Yuel referring to not even being allowed to touch her?

It is so unfair if I am judged as a lolicon just by this.

"I am only stroking her?"

"Although that's the case... but you see, princess carry as such..."

Ruruka says such a thing while behaving suspiciously.

It seems like she is unable to calm down.

I wonder what this reaction means —

When my attention turns towards Ruruka, Yuel starts squirming around.

It seems that it is due me stopping my hand movements.

Behind my head, with all the fingers on her hand intertwined, Yuel seems like she wants to hug my head.

Yuel uses her fingers to caress my head and locks my neck with her elbow and says:

"My, Master"

Yuel is whispering into my ear just a few centimeters away from me.

Just like this, Yuel's cheek closes in onto my face.

Soft silvery hair and cheek.

Yuel's moist skin approaches my cheek and I feel a contact.

And then, Yuel's cheek is pressed against my cheek and she starts rubbing.

Her face is sticking to my face.

In addition, I can smell a faint sweet scent of shampoo used by her during bathing.

My soul is being healed and my heart becomes warm.

"H-Hey, you know a girl must not stick so close to a man?"

This time, Ruruka forcefully sticks her body between Yuel and me.

Closely sticking between Yuel and me.

In other words, in front of me.

It is a distance where I will touch Ruruka if I slightly move my face.

And different from usual, Ruruka is showing a desperate expression.

Contrary to the gentleness of her voice, she forcefully pulls Yuel away from me.

"Ruruka?"

And then my eyes met with Ruruka's.

She might be surprised by her own actions as her eyes grow wide in shock by our close proximity.

Matching her bright red hair, I can also see her big and beautiful green eyes in detail.

This is too close and I feel something weird.

Ruruka is also the same as her face becomes red— no "her whole head is red like a tomato".

....Huh, what is this.

I feel something weird about this flow of events.

"Ruruka-san?"

"Wh, what is it!?"

Her body stiffens when I try to talk to her and she immediately moves a great distance away from me while still having a bright red face.

She avoids looking at my face by looking downwards and shows an uneasy expression.

What's with this.

This reaction.

Furthermore, stopping Yuel from having close body contact with me.

Could it be.

Could this really be it.

... No, I must not get fooled.

Stay calm.

If I look back on Ruruka's past actions.

Even back in the clinic, how many times has a misunderstanding occurred

which leads to a reduction in treatment cost.

This must all be an act.

... However, is this really all an act?

Ruruka's anxious look, bright red face and her suspicious behavior.

If all of this is an act, I might never be able to believe the creatures known as women ever again.

Up until this date, there is no reason for Ruruka to like me.

After all, there is no event of me saving Ruruka's life during danger and we did not come into contact for long.

Eris whom I lived together with for three months in the clinic has a higher chance of liking me.

I do not have any idea why Ruruka showed such an expression.

Our contact is only limited to treatment at the clinic and payment for the service.

Furthermore, Ruruka is an extremely charming woman who will not fall in love with just anyone.

No, she might like me since she allow me to touch her breast.

No, no, she did all this to lower the cost of the treatment.

This is all for the sake of money.

...However, what if she appears money-minded in order to hide her shyness.

No, because, I only got to her name recently.

Our relationship is only till the level of knowing each other.

Huhh, but yet Ruruka knows my name.

I do not recall introducing myself to her.

What?

Is that it?

Like when I go to a convenience store and secretly look at the name tag of a

cute clerk —

No, this is not about the matter of naming.

The main question is, how does Ruruka feel about me?

Although I felt over-conscious, it seems too obvious judging from Ruruka's behavior.

Asking "Do you like me?", it feels so direct that I can't say it out loud.

If, by any chance, I misread Ruruka's behavior, I will be labeled as "Misunderstanding-kun".

It will then only cause me to go "Aahhhh" every time I remember it at night during bedtime.

I can't afford to ask, but I am very curious.

— What is this, it makes me feel very uncomfortable.

Chapter 12: 7th Floor and the Boss Room

In the end, I couldn't say anything to Ruruka who had returned to her usual attitude, so I keep exploring the labyrinth with a dizzy feeling.

And then——

“He, hey, do I really have to do this?”

“It can't be helped you know? It's the best way to do it. Even if me or Yuel do it, our weapon will get damaged.”

—— And then now, a Giant Ant, a big ant-shaped monster, was knocked down in front of my eyes.

Yes, it was scattered. Its belly was facing upward, all the limbs were cut cleanly at the joints and were scattered by Yuel and Ruruka.

The special trait of a Giant Ant, a monster from the 6th floor, is their hard carapace. When fighting with a blade, it won't be a problem to cut the thin limbs if you aim skillfully for the joints, but a sword could get damaged if you forcefully cut the torso.

That's why, I was given a role to finish the Giant Ant as a wielder of a blunt weapon, a mace. Looking at the Giant Ant that was scattered on the ground, I noticed its big jaw first. It's a big savage jaw with jagged teeth, which cut off Eight's(エイト) leg earlier. (Yuz: Reminder-Eight was Man A from chapter 6)

clank-clank The Giant Ant opened and closed its jaw repeatedly, desperately trying to attack me who stood in front of its eyes yet it will never reach. It won't reach because it can't move. It will by no means reach me, but...

After looking at Eight's grave injury, when I see the Giant Ant who was still retaining its fighting spirit even after losing all of its limbs, I get a little bit scared. No, it's just being pretentious. It was all pretty scary.

I looked at its eyes that were filled with fighting spirit, the moment I went in close, it felt like it could jump like a freshly caught fish at any moment and bite me off. With its big jagged jaw. It makes me want to give the mace to Ruruka, and have her substitute the role to finish it instead.

“Hey, Ruruka.....”

“And besides Shiki, you haven’t done anything since we came to the labyrinth right—?”

“Kuh.....”

Her words felt like a stab to the chest. If it was Yuel she wouldn’t have said such a thing. After all Yuel is a nice and gentle girl. Let’s pat her thoroughly later.

“I’m already relieved that Shiki who can use healing magic could stay with us, but I still want to see the cool parts of Shiki, I think?”

Ruruka said it in a light tone. Even after she said that, if you listened to her plain flattery tone, one could understand it. She doesn’t really mean that.

It was that right. “I want to see Shiki-kun’s good parts!” or something like that. But, I’m not that naive. I’m an adult man who won’t do things like leaving the role that was entrusted to him.

Like that time with Eight’s injury, when a lot of blood was gushing out, a cold sweat had broken out on my face that left me as pale as a dead man. Just by looking at the Giant Ant’s jaws makes my legs want to give in. (Yuz: He has a fetish for jaws) I’m probably going to end up hurt.

And so, I averted my gaze from the Giant Ant——

—— Yuel was looking at me.

She was looking at me, who stood still holding the mace in front of the Giant Ant, with sparkling eyes as if expecting something.

You too huh. You’re also telling me to do it huh. No, Yuel herself is just only looking at me.

This wasn’t like Ruruka who did it to make me move. Because it was the pure Yuel. She is really expecting to see her master’s cool, gallant figure when defeating monsters. I didn’t know that there was this much evil presence in front of Yuel until now..... I don’t feel like stopping at all though.

Yuel gazing at me waiting for my move, her round pupils completely dyed with expectation. It seems she wants to burn her master’s gallant figure, my

fighting stance, completely into her eyes. With those sparkling, shining eyes.

..... Ugh, I can't betray those eyes.....

—— I prepared myself

I try to remembering the kendo class I took at school, while as much as possible trying to not look at the Giant Ant's jaw. I grip the heavy mace, take an overhead stance, and yell as I move my center of gravity and swing it down.

"HAAAAAH!"

A dull sensation.

The Giant Ant's head cracked with a *breaking* sound, and its contents started rushing out from the crack.

Gu, gruesome (guro).....

But, I defeated it. For the first time, just now wasn't that a good blow?

"As expected from Master!"

Yuel complimented me at the same time that the Giant Ant turns into light and disappears. For the time being, it's good that I matched Yuel's discernment. I succeed in protecting my dignity as her master. Let's give her a pat in return.

"Shiki, that wasn't bad!"

Without missing a beat, Ruruka also gave her compliment.

"Really?"

"Yup, it was a beautiful swing. Have you been doing some martial arts? It was really cool! Shiki is amazing~."

"Ah, your muscles are so splendid, they're hard!" she praised me while poking my arm that still held the mace.

Apparently I also suited Ruruka's discernment.

"Ah, so you did figure it out?"

All purpose school's kendo. Since I could crush a Giant Ant's head in one blow, perhaps it was truly a critical hit. Besides the amount of people who can learn fighting techniques in this world were probably quite limited. Especially for adventurers, most likely they are self-taught. Hooray for Compulsory education.

“I found it out I found it out~. Eh, erm, it was a full strength strike right! It was a charming blow even for a vanguard like me~.”

I see. I got found out huh. It makes you charmed huh.

“Master, you’re really cool!”

Yuel complimented me again after having been outdone by Ruruka. Well that’s true. Right now, I have a weapon. And also the opponent’s feet were severed so it couldn’t move. There isn’t anything to be feared. Besides, as far as I can see the Giant Ant’s movement were also slow. If it’s one-on-one, I also feel I could still do it.

“Yosh, next time I will try to start fighting from the beginning!”

“Ah, erm, I think it’s too intense for Shiki. Could you just do the finisher?”

“Yes.”

Thanks to the thorough praises from Ruruka and Yuel, I could erase my fear towards Giant Ants, and I did a good job in swinging down the mace. Of course only to deliver the finisher. It’s important to know your own capabilities.

—— And then.

Finally. We made it.

To the 7th level.

The monsters at the 7th level were Slime. The drop is slime jelly. A slime’s jelly. With this, at last, I could replenish those unreliable slime jelly stocks.

The bar waitress’s miniskirt. The inn’s poster girl’s cleavage. The soup stall Onee-sans’ wet see-through. Various scenes pass through my mind.

Ahh, I want to fight soon. Well, the only ones who were fighting were Yuel and Ruruka though. Yuel and Ruruka are already fighting against several slimes. A slime is a gelatinous jelly-like monster with about the size of soccer ball. They have a nucleus in their center, and that is their weak point.

You have to carefully aim at that nucleus to beat it, but it seems Ruruka and Yuel can do it without a hitch. They easily evade the slime’s body slam, and their thrusts accurately penetrated its nucleus. Because it was the only means of attack.

But the slimes' power was unexpectedly high. Slimes harden their body a moment before an attack, so it seems there are possibilities of bone fractures if you took a direct hit. However, that's all.

A slime couldn't always harden its body, and it was neither a poison nor a body made from strong acid. Yeah, the slime isn't as strong as a 7th level monster. But, there seems to be a reason for that.

"So, is that the boss room?"

"It will be tough for our party composition~. Physical attacks are hardly effective for the Boss here."

The Boss.

In the Mel Hearts(メルハーツ) labyrinth, on the 7th level floor, there is a room called the boss room in the middle of it. (Yuz: For the record "Mel Hearts" is Shiki's personal name for the labyrinth, chapter 3)

It seems, there is a theory that the monsters in the level where the boss is located are weak because the boss took all the mana resource on that level. Actually, it is said that both of the 14th level and 21st level also have relatively weak monsters.

The boss in this level is a Huge slime. In terms of body structure and ways to defeat it, it isn't that different from a normal slime, but its huge size is a different story. It is huge, with 3 meters in diameter. Even for a weak slime, with just by changing its size, its strength can jump considerably.

For the Huge slime, a normal sword won't reach its nucleus, and on top of that because of its body's viscous nature, even if you cut it with a sword, the wound would close soon. Moreover, the power that comes with its huge mass also poses a threat. It could easily crush people beneath it. Even the guild was urging people to not lessen their guard when going to the 7th level.

"It'll be tough if we have no one with a high fire magic skill."

"Exactly—, it's not impossible to beat it by scraping from the outside, but I don't want to do that. Well sometimes it gives us a rare drop if we defeat it."

While Ruruka said that, Yuel was staring intently towards the doors that lead to the boss room, but I'm not worried about that. I'm sure she was just

distracted by the ornaments on the doors. I want to believe that Yuel isn't a battle junkie that wants to fight strong enemies with bad compatibility.

“What is the rare drop?

“Etto, there is slime drop that used as material for recovery magic. If I'm not wrong it should have quite the good sale price right? Well, most of time I only get slime jelly as a drop though—.”

“Hee, but well, it doesn't matter to us.”

It wasn't Ruruka who told him that clearly, but the girl who had been staring intently at the boss room's door.

“That's right—. Well, let's just beat the slime in there and go home. We'll start getting hungry soon.”

Oh right, it feels like it will be lunch time soon. It'll be alright if we just follow the main route without detours later. I feel that I want to collect more slime jelly, but as I thought I can't let Yuel get hungry.

“Ahh, you're right.”

The place we went to after the exploring labyrinth, is the guild purchase counter. I have forgotten very important things up to now. That is, in labyrinth exploration this time, I was just looking at the battle behind Yuel and Ruruka. Though it's just the usual.

However, there is a problem. When a monster was defeated, “in its place” it will give us a drop. In other words, inevitably the one who will pick it up is also the one who is closest to the monster, the one who fought it.

What I want to say is, I want to include the slime jelly we got in this exploration in my item box. And now, Ruruka and Yuel want to hand over the materials to the receptionist at the materials purchase counter.

I couldn't find the right time to stop them from selling them off. No, I have thought about it, but I can't bring it up in a way that won't make my honor fall to the ground. Even while being troubled, the receptionist kept her smile, and indifferently informed them the total amount of Zeni from their sale.

And then.

Finally, two-thirds from the total amount, for Yuel and my portions — — are transferred to my bank card.

Along with the receptionist's natural smile.

Chapter 13: Occasion to Celebrate

It's the day after I explored the labyrinth with Ruruka.
Yuel and I are in a corner of the adventurer's guild.
It's late afternoon, around the time when the exchange window starts to get crowded.

"Oh, Yuel. Before I go to the exchange counter, can you hand over all the raw materials?"

Yuel and I managed to clear the 7th floor of the labyrinth while hunting slimes by ourselves without any trouble.
With this, I can finally replenish my precious supply of Slime Jelly.

"All of them?"

"Yeah, so far I've just been selling them without really counting, so I thought it'd be good for future reference if we're gonna keep entering the labyrinth."

I'm sure the pure Yuel would hand them over without a second thought if I just came right out and said, "gimme the Slime Jelly."

But what if, a few years later, the memory pops back up?

If Yuel in her difficult years comes to revile me, and I go to pat her head and she lashes back "I don't want to be touched by Master!"

I might just keel over from the shock.
No, really.

The current Yuel is cute.
Meek, adorable, fond of me.

But in the future, what will happen when Yuel grows up?
Will she have a rebellious age?
Dye her hair a flashy color and get a tan? (TN: [gyaru](#) style)
She already has silver hair and dark skin though.

"Um, Master?"

I turn my eyes toward the voice, and there's Yuel taking the raw materials out

of her item box, head slightly tilted, gazing up at me.

"Ah, Yuel is so cute..."

Those words casually escape my lips.

"...! N-No way, me? C-C-Cute?"

Yuel yelps in surprise and her cheeks turn slightly red.
She bashfully glances around and fidgets nervously.

Obviously, she's shy.
Such a cute, girly reaction.

...she must not be used to being praised.
Come to think of it, even I, the one closest to her, have never really praised Yuel's appearance.
I feel like I've only ever complimented things like her fighting ability.

This is no good.

Yuel is a girl.
If she doesn't get accustomed to some degree of praise from a young age, one day she might get taken advantage of by some bad guy who flatters her.
It's not like I want her to become tough like Ruruka, but with how pretty she is, I can't let her self-esteem stay this low.

"I mean it, Yuel is cute. You have a nice smile. I feel like I'm being healed just by seeing Yuel's smile."

"T-That's not..."

Yuel hides her face in her hands and shakes her head.
Her face may be covered but I can clearly see her bright red ears.

This is kinda fun.

No, this still isn't enough praise.
It's dangerous for a girl to have no resistance to being praised.
For the sake of Yuel's future, I must praise her more.

"Yuel's hair is so smooth and nice to touch. It looks so glossy it's like an angel's halo. Yes, Yuel is as cute as an angel!"

"A-As an angel...?"

With one hand still pressed against her cheek, Yuel fiddles with her long, silver hair with the other hand.

She must really be embarrassed, squirming around like that.

S-so fun...

Have I ever gotten such a great reaction just from praising a girl before? No, there's no way.

Eris' cold, chiding response even though I only told her "you have a pretty face" is still fresh in my mind.

"Yuel's skin is beautiful too. It's an exquisite shade, not too light or dark. I love how healthy it looks. You always wear pants, maybe you could try a skirt next time?"

"L-L-Love!?"

Come to think of it, I don't remember buying anything for Yuel to wear other than practical clothes.

She's probably at the age where girls start to become fashion-conscious. And today was a payday, so why don't I buy Yuel some cute clothes?

"Yuel is cute. It's fun just being with you. I'm so happy, I want us to be together forever."

"I-I want to be together with Master forever too!"

Yuel responds with tears welling up in her eyes. She's so overcome with happiness at my praise, she latches on to me and starts to sob.

Uh, aren't these waterworks a bit overboard?

I'm starting to really worry about a bad guy taking advantage of her someday.

And I feel a little guilty seeing her so overjoyed from my half-teasing compliments.

Well, it's not like I was lying about the aspects I praised.

Feeling a bit awkward, I avert my eyes from Yuel —

and onto Eight and Geyser, watching us from the line in front of the exchange counter.

...Oh yeah, we were in the guild this whole time.

Having just committed the reprehensible act of (apparently) driving a little slave girl to tears with backhanded compliments in front of the entire Adventurer's Guild, I hastily made my exit along with Eight and Geyser.

"H-hey, guess what, we made it to the 7th floor by ourselves today."

"Eyy, that far already? Nice going!"

"I knew you two could do it, but I didn't expect you to make it so far this fast!"

I talk with Eight and Geyser as we walk down the road toward the tavern. The tavern is located closer to the labyrinth. It's not that far away, but at the moment I'm thankful even for this short distance.

In the guild, they probably didn't hear what I was talking about with Yuel, but what was certain was that I made a little girl blush and cry. The looks I got from around the room were painful.

The only saving grace is that Eight and Geyser know that my relationship with Yuel is pure.

I'm a little worried about their giant grins, though.

"Well, exploring the labyrinth is Yuel's specialty, I'm not doing anything."

"But isn't it reassuring to have a healer like Shiki for support? You can use EX Heal, you not only healed my leg but before I knew it all the scars on my body were gone."

"Ah, as for the scars, I was in a hurry when I saw Eight's injury back then. That happens sometimes when I use healing magic, occasionally it heals places other than the injury."

When I first came to this world, my magic power rose dramatically. It's relatively stable now, but for the first few days I couldn't control the excess magical power very well, and when I tried healing a small cut on a fingertip I ended up casting EX Heal around the target's whole body.

I'm just glad that it didn't end up making my healing magic weaker or entirely unusable instead.

"Well, I've heard that magic won't even activate if you rush it. What's with your healing magic?"

"I don't even know, myself. Well, whatever, today's a celebration!"

When we get to the bar, I order better quality alcohol than usual, and a steady stream of food.

The healing clinic is closed today.

Why is that? Because today's the special day that I got my hands on Slime Jelly.

The day that my friendship with Eight and Geyser paid off.



""""Cheers!""""

We clink our mugs to celebrate reaching the 7th floor.

Yuel has no idea what the celebratory mood is for or why we're clinking mugs, but she clinks her glass of juice too.

It wouldn't be right to leave her out.

"Um, Master. What are we celebrating for?"

"It's to celebrate Yuel working so hard to explore the labyrinth."

There's no way I can tell her it's to celebrate getting the Slime Jelly. I have to deceive her somehow.

"Huh? It's for the SI – ouch!"

I won't forget to stomp on clueless Geyser's foot either when he nearly exposes it.

"Well anyway, today's a celebration. Shiki, let's order more."

Eight picks up on my behavior and changes the topic.
Thank goodness Eight can read the atmosphere.
Not like Geyser.
I'm blessed to have such a good friend.

"Okay, today is my treat. Order as much as you want!"

"Really, Shiki! In that case, some soft-shelled turtle and—" We don't need that."

We keep eating and drinking and eating and drinking, the sun's probably gone down by now.

I feel like I drank too much too fast, caught up in Geyser's pace as he kept ordering expensive liquor without restraint.

Geyser can really hold his liquor, he treats it like he's just chugging water. If I try to match drinks with this guy, I'll end up like Eight who crawled off to the toilet and hasn't come back.

I glance over at Yuel and find her staring intently at the waitress' miniskirt.

I wonder what's up.

There's no way she could be hoping for a panty shot.

Oh, now that I think about it, I told her earlier today that a skirt might suit her.

That's probably it.

"That reminds me, I need to give Yuel a present."

"A present?"

She looks puzzled, maybe because it was out of nowhere.

"Yeah, since Yuel is always working so hard. As a reward for that."

"N-No, I can't..."

Yuel hangs her head shyly.

She's trying to show restraint.

But I kinda want to see how she looks in a skirt too.

I couldn't make her wear it in the labyrinth while I watch her battle fiercely from behind, but there shouldn't be any problem with it as casual wear around town.

"I'm doing it because I want to give you a present. As thanks for always taking care of me."

I push back again.

"I-In that case "Hey Shiki, we got some Red Dragon Killer! Come have a drink!"

Geyser thoughtlessly calls out while holding a bottle.

...He really does not read the atmosphere.

Yuel and I were in the middle of talking.

But, it's a time of celebration.

I'll put up with it for now.

"Wow, is it a good drink?"

"Well it costs 5000 Zeni. I've never tried it, but it's gotta be good, right?"

...T-This guy really doesn't hold back.

I said it was my treat, but 5000 Zeni, is he really going to help himself to 50,000 yen worth of liquor that thoughtlessly?

While I'm shuddering at the thought of today's tab, Geyser is pouring the 5000 Zeni liquor generously into his own glass.

The bottle is small, so at this rate he's going to finish it off by himself.

"H-Hey, wait! I'll drink too!"

It would be unforgivable if I paid for a 5000 Zeni bottle and didn't get to drink any of it.

I wrench the bottle away from Geyser and pour the remaining quarter of Red Dragon Killer straight into my mouth.

It burns.

It's stronger than I expected and makes me want to cough, but I can't spill such expensive liquor.

I swallow it all in one gulp.

I feel a heat boiling up from the pit of my stomach.

...This is pretty strong booze.

I feel my consciousness immediately start to slip away.

"...Isn't this way too strong?"

"Really? Seems fine to me."

I'm about ready to give up and pass out, but Geyser has drained his glass and seems none the worse for wear.

Geyser is short. Maybe he's actually a dwarf? They're supposed to be natural drinkers.

Ahh, Yuel says something to me, but I can't understand any of it.

Maybe she wants to continue the conversation from earlier?

It's impossible, my consciousness is cutting out, I don't know what she's saying.

Red Dragon Killer was too strong for me.

Yuel somehow looks like she's full of motivation.

I'm sure the thought of receiving a present is making her say stuff like "I'll try even harder in the labyrinth from now on!"

"Ah, do your best."

I don't know if the words came out well.
But Yuel looks happy.
I'm sure I got the point across.

It's impossible.
I can't hold my head up any longer.
I'm so sleepy I can't help it.

I let my face fall onto the table and close my eyelids.

Chapter 14: A Chance to See

"Ah, good morning, master."

When I awoke, Yuel's blue eyes were right in front of my face.

"Yeah, good morning."

Yuel is propped up next to me in bed, intently gazing at my face. Apparently she was watching me as I slept. I bring a hand to my lips and feel a trickle of drool. It's a bit embarrassing.

But it's unusual for Yuel to be awake before I am. Normally she wakes up a little after I get up. ...Well, it's not like she's never risen early to stare at my "tent".

The atmosphere feels slightly different than usual, though. Mixed in with her smile, there's a sense of accomplishment like a feeling of satisfaction or something along those lines. She seems a little tired too. I wonder what happened?

Oh right, I got wasted at the tavern last night. How did that turn out? I remember passing out on the table, but Yuel and I are together on the bed. And why is the tired Yuel wearing that satisfied expression—

...No, it can't be.

Looking closely at Yuel, instead of the usual thin comfy pajamas, she's dressed to go outside. Why has she already changed her clothes? Did she wake up early and have nothing better to do than to get changed? Or maybe, did she do something to get them dirty while I was asleep—

...No no, there's no way that would happen.

I surreptitiously inspect my clothes beneath the blanket.

Everything seems to be in order. It's the same outfit as yesterday. My pants and underwear are still in place. The belt is tightly tied, and nothing's particularly dirty.

Thank goodness. Nothing happened.

But if nothing happened then why is Yuel...

She happened to wake up early, got dressed and then got bored of waiting for me so she slipped back into bed again? She looks tired because she didn't get enough sleep? Is that how it went?

"Did someone carry me here yesterday?"

"Yes, Geyser-san brought Master back."

"I see..."

I need to thank him... wait, why should I? It's Geyser's fault for ordering the Red Dragon Killer that got me wasted in the first place. Sure, I'm the one who physically drank from it. But I meant it on an emotional level.

For breakfast, we head to the tavern. We commute there every day without fail, so at this point we're the most regular of regular customers. Well, it's only natural since I run the treatment stall there.

As I look inside the shop, Miniskirt Waitress-san glances over and waves. Um, the girl with the black panties. What color are they today? I really want to know.

I've spoken with her maybe 2-3 times since the day she fell down and I healed her, but there haven't been any particular developments. I'd like to get close enough with her that she'd willingly lift up her skirt for me, so I've struck up a conversation with her a few times, but maybe on account of her clumsiness she has her hands full with work and doesn't have much time to chat.

In other words, she and I aren't very close.

But having said that, she's being friendly today for some reason. Waving enthusiastically with a warm smile. I'd rather see that skirt wave though.

I start to wave back— then the realization sinks in.

She's not waving at me.

It feels like she's looking slightly to the side. I lower my hand and look over — Yuel is bashfully waving to Waitress-san.

Yuel-san, when did you become so close with her? Aren't you getting along

better with her than me, who healed her for free?

I wonder if you got a chance to while I was asleep yesterday.

Even so, while I was struggling to make progress, you captured Clumsy Waitress-san in a single night? You devious child. You absolutely must teach me your techniques.

Yuel stops waving, and Waitress-san's attention shifts over to me. When our eyes meet, she smiles sweetly. She stops her work, and walks over to me in a hurry.

Has she fallen for me?

No, that's not it. What could it be?

We haven't taken a seat yet, so she wouldn't be coming to take our orders. Maybe she had something to talk about with Yuel? But that smile was definitely aimed at me.

What's with this? I'm getting my hopes up.

Yesterday, did Yuel portray me in a good light? Maybe now she's feeling like "I already thought you were nice, but you truly are a kind person! Take me!"

As these thoughts are running through my head, Waitress-san arrives in front of me. And then, with a big smile, and a cheerful voice—

"Last night's bill comes out to 12,000 Zeni!"

".....Right."

We finish our meal at the tavern and enter the labyrinth. Our goal is the 7th floor.

I have enough Slime Jelly for the time being, but now I want money. This morning, the contents of my wallet have all but disappeared, and I promised to give clothes to Yuel.

Since it's a present for Yuel, I should get something new rather than used. As long as I'm buying new, I want it to be high-quality. And good clothes aren't cheap. An outfit typically goes for thousands of Zeni.

That's why I want to secure the biggest budget possible.

Slimes are weak, but the mobs on the 7th floor drop magic stones at a reliable rate. That makes the 7th floor a good place to farm for money. It's not like I haven't thought about the fact that I'm buying Yuel a present with the earnings from monsters that she defeated, but I'm sure she doesn't mind that sort of thing.

Getting to the 7th floor feels like second nature by now. Monsters up to the 3rd floor can't even be considered opponents for Yuel anymore, and we can ignore the slow Green Ivy and Giant Ant if they're not in our way. She takes the initiative against Big Tick by throwing knives as soon as they appear to reduce their numbers, so we make quick progress.

And just like that, we reach the 7th floor. It seems to be a well-known hunting ground for adventurers, and we occasionally even come across groups that bring tents to camp overnight. Since they managed to make it past the comparatively dangerous 5th and 6th floors, they probably want to hang around the 7th floor as long as possible.

But the overnight hunters need one person to stand watch while the others sleep. That would be pretty difficult with just the two of us. There's also the problem of losing track of time if you stay in the labyrinth too long.

We could potentially use consumable magic items that create a barrier with a certain duration, and watches exist too, but we'd need money for those things. They're not items you could afford just by spending a few days in the labyrinth. And I'm broke now anyway. Shopping will have to wait.

We continue hunting around the 7th floor and eventually arrive at the boss room.

Within the boss room awaits the Huge Slime. Its rare drop is Slime Drop. From what I overheard at the adventurer's guild, a single one apparently sells for 200,000 Zeni.

200,000 Zeni, huh...

Although it's a rare drop, a single one would land us twice what we make from a half-day hunt on the 7th floor. That's quite a lot of money. I want money. As much money as I can get.

But hold on. What if we can't beat it?

Huge Slime is around 3m in size. Yuel would be facing it with a 20-30cm knife. I can't possibly see us winning against it by ourselves.

I glance over at Yuel and she's staring at the boss door with a pumped-up expression like "I'm ready whenever!" But we can't go in like this.

It's safer to continue to hunt slimes normally, and the efficiency isn't bad. We're not so desperate for money to justify it.

There's no need for such a high-risk method.

"I'm ready whenever!"

"No, we're not going."

Yuel said exactly what I thought she would, but there's no need for us to do it.

She looks disappointed, but there's nothing I can do about that. She's certainly talented, but there's a reckless side to her. I'll have to keep that in check in the future too. That's my responsibility as her guardian.

"Master, I'm just going to go fix my hair."

After the labyrinth exploration we head to the usual tavern. As soon as Yuel leaves for the restroom, Ruruka drops by my treatment stall. Her timing is suspiciously convenient.

"Shiki, I got hurt. Heal meee."

Ruruka closes the curtain behind her back as she enters the stall with a wry grin. Yeah, she knows where this is going.

"This isn't Eris' hospital, you know. One Heal is 400 Zeni."

"C'mon, can't we decide on the fee after you take a look at the injury?"

As she speaks, she pops open her shirt buttons one by one. Her chest gradually becomes visible. From the gap in her shirt a valley peeks out from between two plentiful peaks. I catch a glimpse of a cute white undergarment decorated with frills, unusual for an adventurer.

Once Ruruka unfastens the 4th button, she exposes her shoulders assertively. There's a cut that looks like she got caught on something sharp.

"It's such a teeny-tiny wound, don't you think?"

"The treatment fee depends on the magic used, it has nothing to do with the size of the wound."

I firmly refuse. Of course, this is the start of our negotiation play.

—How does Ruruka feel about this, though?

Her expression when we went to the labyrinth together two days ago... That attitude made it seem like she was jealous of Yuel.

Up until then I had thought she was just the kind of woman who didn't mind fooling around a little to save money, but I have a feeling that's not quite accurate. This is a good opportunity to find out.

I'll see how far she'll let me go and judge accordingly. Or rather, I want to push it as far as she's willing to let me go.

"Ehhhh, it's really a small wound though? Why don't you get a closer look..."

Ruruka stands up and bends her body forward. Her lovely face is nearly touching mine. As I look down, that bare valley greets me. Her bountiful breasts jiggle and sway under the effects of gravity.

She said to get a good look, but all it took was a glance to know that Heal would take care of the injury. Yet Ruruka is letting me continue. You might say this is proof of our mutual understanding.

Regardless, what a refreshing view. I still need to determine how far Ruruka will go today, though. I can't let it end here.

"Hmmm, it's still hard to see..."

"Ehh? W-Well, it can't be helped..."

Ruruka looks around nervously and double-checks the curtain before turning back to me. Her face seems somewhat flushed.

"I-In that case can you tell by touch?"

Then Ruruka grabs my hands and pulls them onto her breasts.

"Mmh....."

I feel a soft sensation as my fingers sink into her flesh. Through her shirt, that is. My palms press into her abundant mounds and they squeeze together impressively along her exposed midline. Ruruka can't meet my eyes anymore and she's looking away in embarrassment.

We've done this a few times before, but the fact that she might actually be into me adds some exquisite spice to the experience. I start to waver.

But this much is just the default route. It always ends here with the discount. This is the critical point for me to find out how far I can take it.

"Hmm, I can't tell from over your shirt."

"Eh? Ah... ummm."

Is it no good after all? She's hesitating. Casting furtive glances in my direction, face flushed, considering it.

"Shiki..."

Ruruka opens her mouth. There's a soft sensation on my fingertips and a sweet voice pleading in my ear.

—But I'm no longer paying attention.

Because my eyes met hers.

"...Eh?"

Yuel's. She had returned.

Chapter 15: Lie

"Mas...ter?"

Behind Ruruka's back, Yuel has returned from the bathroom and is staring at us in shock. Her eyes are vacant and her mouth is slightly agape. It's as if she can't understand the scene in front of her eyes.

This is bad. Extraordinarily bad.

Right now, my hands are stretched out to grab hold of Ruruka's plentiful peaks, and Ruruka herself is opening her shirt far enough to expose her shoulders and a great deal of skin.

...The circumstantial evidence is all here.

Yuel is standing on the other side of Ruruka, so she can't exactly see if I'm actually rubbing her breasts.

But with my outstretched arms, Ruruka's state of undress, and the distance between us...

Of course Yuel will assume we're doing something indecent. After all, we are.

If I had to put it into words, I was rubbing Ruruka's breasts in lieu of a treatment fee.

...I can't let Yuel find out about that.

If I told the trusting-to-a-fault Yuel, my carefully constructed image as a respectable master will come crumbling down in an instant. I can't let that happen. That star-struck admiration reflected in Yuel's eyes is one of my greatest pleasures. I can't make any mistakes at a time like this.

Think. Think, dammit.

This is the turning point that will decide whether or not I remain a master worthy of Yuel's respect. This is my [Battle of Mt. Tennou](#).

—There's no choice but to deceive her.

"Man, that sure was a tough wound to treat. Right, Ruruka?"

I remove my hands from Ruruka's chest and give her a look that says to play along. Ruruka has good judgment. She'll probably respond with something like "That's why you had to cast the healing magic carefully with direct skin contact! Thanks for going to the trouble!"

I look into Ruruka's eyes expectantly. In response, Ruruka stares back with an intense expression.

Our gazes remain locked for a good 2 or 3 seconds. Did she get my message? A grin floats up on Ruruka's face—

—and she grabs my right arm.

With one hand, Ruruka deftly unfastens the remaining shirt button and fully reveals the delicate undergarment. Then she takes the hand she grabbed and starts to forcefully knead it into her breast over her underwear. Ahh, it's soft.

"Mmh... so, how is it?"

Does she...

...still want to continue our price negotiation?

This development is bad. I won't be able to convince Yuel at this rate. Does Ruruka not realize that Yuel is here?

...No, that can't be. True, she can't see Yuel behind her, but she must have heard Yuel's voice.

Even if she somehow failed to hear it, she should at least question my sudden change in attitude.

But now what? This is a bad situation. It's getting worse. So soft. What do I do? She's moving my arm back and forth. I can feel the elasticity of her breast. What should I do? Her skin is sticking to me. Those frills on her white undergarment are cute. Ohhh it's soft. My hand runs over the soft-as-silk cloth and I feel the swell of her even softer flesh. I want to squeeze them. To topple those twin peaks. To feel them squish and spring back.

"Mmh..."

When my hands brush over the parts of her breasts that aren't covered by the undergarment, the sensation of them gently clinging to my fingers is—

"Ahh... mmmm..."

The sensation...

...How long have I been fondling Ruruka's breasts with both hands?

Ruruka's face is flushed bright red and her breath is getting ragged. Her exposed chest and stomach are tinged cherry pink. It's quite a turn-on. At this rate, she might even let me go all the wa—

"A-Ah, M-Mas...ter was..."

—A trembling voice breaks me out of my animal fervor.

...Right, it's Yuel's voice.

I rapidly return to my senses. Bad, bad, bad! Alarm bells are going off in my head.

I tear my eyes away from Ruruka's chest and look behind her—

—Yuel's anguished face is on the verge of tears.

"s-stole...nnn... uuuh, uhuhu..."

When our eyes meet, Yuel's mouth hardens into a grimace and her clenched fists tremble as she looks on. Those eyes are full of sorrow. Enough tears are gathered in them to overflow at any second.

And then—

"Uuh, uehh, ueeeeeeeeeeeeh, uwaaahh"

She breaks down. She's not just sobbing, she's bawling. Trying but failing to hold back her tears.

"Ah, um, Yuel, this is, well..."

Oh no. This has turned into a disaster. Yuel is crying. I have to do something to fix this.

I have to do something, but... but the words won't come out. Even if it was just for a moment, what could I possibly say to Yuel when I forgot about her and let myself get completely swallowed up by lust.

W-What should I do——

"Ah, eh, n-no way!? S-Sorry, I'm so sorry, Yuel-chan!"

Ruruka spins around at the sound of Yuel crying and hastily tries to calm her down.

"I-I'm really sorry, ok? I didn't mean to make you sad... Um, uh, I was just borrowing him for a bit, I did...didn't steal Shiki from you, ok? Uhhh... hey, see, it was treatment! Yeah, it was a serious case, so I was just having Shiki check that it was really healed! That's all it was, r-right, Shiki?"

Ruruka takes on a gentle tone to comfort Yuel. And, probably unable to bear Yuel's sobbing, she twists the facts. A fine performance.

"T-That's right! That was "palpation", a traditional medical technique. It was such a tough injury, even after casting healing magic I needed to make sure there weren't any abnormalities!"

It's a flimsy excuse, though. No matter how trusting Yuel is, this might be hopeless.

"...I-Is that really... true?"

Yuel's head snaps back up. Tears are still clinging to her bloodshot eyes.

But, she stops crying.

...This might just work. I have mixed feelings about her being so easy to fool, though.

"O-Of course it's true, Yuel-chan!"

"I-I wouldn't lie to you!"

But the only option here is to lie.

"...R-really, do you really mean it?"

Hearing our words, Yuel looks at me with pleading eyes. I can tell from her expression that she wants to know the truth.

I feel so guilty...

But I don't know what it would do to Yuel's mental state if I told her "The truth is I gave in to my lust and fondled Ruruka's breasts."

Right, this is a white lie.

A lie in order to avoid hurting Yuel. I suppress my feelings of guilt and desperately resist the urge to look away. And then, with no hint of shame and the sweetest tone possible, I speak.

"Look, Yuel. Take a good look at Ruruka's chest. There's no wound anymore, right? That's because I just healed it, see?"

The injury was on Ruruka's shoulder rather than her chest, though. Besides, it's not like the fact that there's no injury proves anything about how tough it was to heal.

But between Yuel's gullible personality, the trust I've built up with her so far, and my co-conspirator Ruruka backing up my alibi...

With any luck...

"...! T-Thank goodness... oh thank goodness..."

As I sit down, Yuel rushes over and hugs my chest.

We pulled it off. Turned it around by the skin of our teeth. We managed to trick Yuel.

She's still sniffing, but these are surely tears of relief. It's gonna be okay.

"Don't worry about the fee, Ruruka. We're going home now."

The sun is still up. It's a little early, but I'm not in the mood to get drunk. It's better to send Yuel straight to bed. I'm sure the usual energetic Yuel will be back after a good night's sleep.

By the time we reach the inn, Yuel has completely stopped crying. However—

"Let's try to make it to the 8th floor of the labyrinth tomorrow, Yuel."

"Okay..."

"O-Ohh, or we could find some more party members and try going to the boss room. Its rare drop is supposedly pretty valuable. Maybe Eight and Geyser can introduce us to the other adventurers they know."

"Is that so..."

The cheap inn is located far from the labyrinth. There aren't many customers, so it's dead quiet even though it's still early. The light from the setting sun streams in through the wooden window and tinges Yuel's face red.

Yuel's expression is... gloomy.

For a long time, Yuel seems to be lost in thought. Has my lie been exposed? It was a pretty flimsy excuse. Has she started to see through it now that she's calmed down?

...Better test the waters.

"Yuel, what's the matter?"

A vague question. But it gets a response out of Yuel.

"...It still hurts."

Yuel mutters softly.

"It hurts? Oh no! EX Heal!"

The light of my healing magic envelops Yuel's entire body. I go all out, putting a great deal of MP into the spell. Enough to instantly fix any incurable disease out there.

"...That didn't help. Ever since I saw Master and Ruruka together, it's been painful. I know that it was just for the sake of treatment, but my chest has been hurting since then."

...Ah, that's not something that can be cured with healing magic.

Even so, it looks like she bought the lie. I'm worried for her future after all.

"Welllll, that's..."

Is it jealousy? Or rather, insecurity? It's obvious that Yuel has strong feelings for me. Whether that's as a parent or as a man, the sight of the person she cherishes rubbing another woman's breasts must have had a serious impact.

"Master, won't you do that palpation thing for me too?"

Yuel blurts that out and starts to peel off her shirt.

"Is it... no good?"

She begs me with upturned eyes. Yuel raises the shirt over her chest and exposes her light brown skin. There's nothing left to cover that skin but her long silver hair.

"T-That's not..."

I have no idea how to respond to her request. Since Yuel's problem is emotional rather than physical, touching her chest won't resolve the issue.

Yeah, that won't solve anything. However,
Yuel's eyes are clearly trembling with anxiety.

Mixed in with that, is a sense that Yuel feels insecure about her appeal. If I reject her now, it's going to end up being a severe blow to her ego. That's the feeling I get from her look.

...I have no choice.

Right, this is a medical procedure. Okay even if it isn't, it's a therapy of sorts for Yuel's troubled mind.

There's nothing questionable about it. Nothing questionable at all.

It has to be done in order to protect Yuel's peace of mind. Then, as I reach out to Yuel's chest—

—a certain phrase crosses my mind.

Playing doctor.

Suddenly, something in my head clears up, and I see myself from an outside perspective.

It's back when I was in kindergarten, and I'm playing doctor with a neighborhood girl named Eri-chan. It seems harmless when it's two innocent kids, but if I swap my adult self into the scene, the atmosphere turns seriously immoral.

There's Yuel's petite figure standing before me. And reaching toward it are the large hands of an adult. If I keep going, it will probably placate her for the time being.

But, I can't do it after all. I can't go through with it.

...I feel like it would be crossing a line as a human being.

Besides, I don't know how long my reason can hold out if she keeps coming to me for palpations from now on. The current Yuel is still developing. I'm happy just to receive her bashful smile; it's not like I want it to turn into that kind of relationship at this point.

I have to draw the line.

Besides, Yuel is still a child. She can't make a distinction between dependence and love at this age. If it's just dependence, all I have to do is relieve her worries. If it's love... no, it's still too early for that.

Let's think of an alternative.

I wrap the hand that was reaching towards Yuel's chest around her back instead. Instead of palpation, I'll cuddle her and pet her head. The things I always do when we explore the labyrinth.

"What I said before about wanting us to be together forever, is the truth. I don't want you to worry about that."

Yuel is silent. Now that I'm holding her I can no longer see her expression. She isn't reacting at all.

Even so, I keep petting her. This has always worked in the past. It should work out this time too.

...As I continue to pet her, Yuel abruptly speaks.

"...Master said he would buy me a present because I worked hard, right? If I work even harder, then... will Master give me a reward?"

"...Sure."

I'm a bit concerned about what kind of reward she means, but I can't refuse at this point.

I give her a nod. I'll gladly put it off for some other time.

Accepting my words, Yuel lets go of me...

"I'm... fine now. Good night, Master."

She says with a bashful smile.

My eyes snap open.

My surroundings are still dark, illuminated only by the moonlight streaming in through the window.

It's probably closer to midnight than morning. I must have woken up at a strange time thanks to going to bed so early yesterday.

Guess I'll go to the bathroom.

I lift up my body, and then it hits me.

Yuel is gone.

Chapter 16: To the Boss Room

The bed is empty. I don't hear the sound of her breathing; the room is silent. Yuel should be right here, but she's gone.

It's late at night. Moonlight is faintly streaming in from the window. Dawn is still far off.

Where could she possibly have gone at a time like thi—

—Suddenly I'm reminded of Yuel's trembling expression from yesterday.

My stomach sinks. I have a bad feeling about this.

...Maybe she just got up to use the restroom. That's the first thing I should check. I climb down to the first floor of the inn and knock on the restroom door.

There's no reply.

"If I work even harder, then..."

I recall Yuel's words from yesterday.

Work harder... at what, labyrinth exploration? ...Don't tell me she went into the labyrinth at a time like this? All by herself.

No, no way. To enter the labyrinth while I'm still asleep, even Yuel wouldn't do that. She would at least ask my permission first. ...Or have I driven her so far into a corner that she's no longer able to ask?

What if, just maybe, she did enter the labyrinth? Knowing Yuel, she could make it to the 7th floor by herself. Rather, it's probably easier for her to make it without me.

But, if by "work harder" she meant to produce better results than she has thus far...

—And so she went to the boss room?

I even told her about the rare drop and how much it would help our results.

That would be really bad. Yuel can't win against that boss.

Huge Slime has a body that's 3m in diameter. Yuel would be facing it with a

20-30cm knife. No matter how agile Yuel's movements are, or how skilled she is with the knife, her body is that of a child.

How much time would it take to whittle down that giant body with such a tiny knife? As the battle dragged on, she'd eventually start to get exhausted from running around while attacking and dodging. Once her movements became dull, the Huge Slime would crush her. That image—

—just thinking about it is making my pulse race.

I need to find her. Yuel might already be on the way to the boss room by herself.

Yesterday, Yuel said that she was okay. She was smiling by the end. Maybe she didn't enter the labyrinth after all? The moon is nice tonight, maybe she's just out for a walk.

But there's no way I can sit around and wait patiently.

"Huff... Hah..."

I run along the main street toward the labyrinth. The streets are quiet. I still have a long way to go.

Did Yuel really go to the labyrinth? I have no proof. But, thinking over yesterday's conversation, it's definitely possible.

I suddenly spot a drunkard sitting on the road ahead. ...Could he have seen Yuel?

"Nh... Hey you, did you see a dark elf girl pass by here?"

If you saw her, please tell me. And please tell me she wasn't heading toward the labyrinth. If that were the case I could return to the inn and wait for Yuel. And I could shake off this growing unease.

"Huhh?"

"Tell me, did you see her or not?"

"...I did, why?"

"...! How long ago? Do you know where she went?"

Hurry and tell me. I unconsciously grab the drunkard by the shoulders and

shake him.

"Wha, what's your problem? Sh, she went that way. 'bout 10 minutes ago!"

The drunkard shrugs off my arms and points.

...His fingertip aims toward the center of town, in the direction of the labyrinth.

The labyrinth walls give off a dim light, illuminating the signposts that indicate the shortest route as I dash through the labyrinth.

I advance through the passages and soon come across a Fang Rabbit, which is nimble enough to catch up with me if I try to run from it.

I rush over to it and swing my mace down.

"Gh...!"

It easily dodges, and a sharp pain runs up my arm. Looking down, the Fang Rabbit has sunk its fangs into my right arm. My sleeve is torn, and blood is oozing out.

I try to pry it off, but the Fang Rabbit's jaw is firmly clamped on my arm. I try shaking it off, I try pulling it off with my left arm, but it won't come loose.

"Shit...!"

I can't be wasting time on the first floor like this.

—If I don't hurry, Yuel could make it to the boss room before me...

I slam the Fang Rabbit against the wall with both arms.

"Aaarghh...!"

At the moment of impact, its fangs pierce even deeper. The sharp pain turns into a dull, unpleasant ache that runs along my entire arm.

But, I can heal it. It's a treatable injury.

Reassuring myself, I slam it even harder against the wall. After countless blows, the Fang Rabbit dissolves into light.

"Hah... huff..."

Without Yuel, even a Fang Rabbit is such a difficult fight for me?

Do I need to go back and find someone to team up with? No, it's the dead of night. I could probably convince Eight's group or Ruruka to come, but I don't even know where they're staying. The adventurer's guild will be nearly deserted too. And convincing a stranger to cooperate will take time. I don't have enough money to recruit someone on the spot.

Once Yuel enters the boss room, she won't be able to leave until the boss is dead. Which means I have to stop her before she reaches it. And she already has a 10 minute head start over me. If I go back now I doubt I'll make it to her in time.

"I can only press forward."

There's no need to defeat any monsters. I just need to outrun them.

Plus, I have my healing magic. As long as I don't die in one hit, I can recover. I just need to catch up with Yuel, then we can return together. With each passing second, Yuel gets deeper into the labyrinth. I can't turn back now.

I run and run and run, getting bitten by monsters and slamming them into the wall, never stopping.

At last I reach the stairs to the second floor. But I haven't come across Yuel yet.

I run from the second floor to the third floor in a daze. There aren't a lot of monsters along the designated route, but they still appear.

Ignoring the Salt Puppet, I keep running. Stabbed by the Goblin, I keep running. Enduring the Green Ivy's lashes, I keep running. Sending the Big Tick flying, I keep running.

It's painful. So many times, I felt like I was going to die. Surrounded by Goblins, chased by Big Ticks, swinging my mace, I somehow keep running.

I want to turn back.

I want to go back to sleep at the inn. I want to go get wasted at the tavern.

But, if I go back now, Yuel might make it to the boss room.

If I went back knowing that, my heart couldn't handle it. There should still be enough time.

Following the posts, I whip around the corner of a passage.

...And I suddenly lose my balance. My body becomes airborne. From the force of my momentum, my head hits the ground. The ridges on the floor scrape against my cheek and blood starts to flow.

I press the ground with my hand to stand up, but my hand slips.

What in the—

I look behind me, and there's a Giant Ant covered in blood that's chewing on something. In its mouth is a light brown leather shoe.

...That's... my... foot.

The end of my right leg is gone.

Red. My thoughts go completely red. I'm done for. I'm hurt. It burns. It feels awful. In the shadow of the passage, I didn't notice it. The blood continues to flow. The Giant Ant draws near. Its huge mandibles, stained with blood, keep making a crunching noise. This is bad, this is so bad. I need to heal.

"—EX Heal...ngh...!"

My flesh ripples out and forms into a new foot. A pleasant warmth soothes the pain. I jump away from the Giant Ant as its mandibles snap shut around the place where my right leg was, just a moment ago.

I keep running. I haven't caught up with her yet.

I descend the staircase to the 7th floor. Yuel must have already gotten this far.

My clothes are soaked with blood, ripped and torn. The result of running past the monsters to catch up with Yuel.

I could still catch up with her. She might actually be just around the corner.

I dodge an attacking slime and continue to run. I sprint toward the center of the level.

—And finally, I arrive at the boss door.

I made it here. I made it here, without running into Yuel.

Did I fail to get here in time?

No, if Yuel was inside the boss room, surely she would still be in the middle of fighting.

Compared to the humble labyrinth, the huge, extravagantly decorated door sticks out like a sore thumb.

If I open the door now and go inside...

"Huh, Shiki? ...! What happened, you're covered in blood!"

"Man, you're a mess. You okay?"

—Some voices suddenly call out to me from behind.

It's Eight and Geyser. Looking around, a few other adventurers are gathered. There's a magic user, too.

There are many parties that hang out on the 7th floor overnight. This must be one of those.

I'm saved. It should be doable now.

"Eight! Geyser! When I woke up, Yuel was gone... Yuel... Yuel might be fighting the boss right now!"

Upon hearing my words, Eight looks at me in shock.

And then Geyser...

...makes a face like "What is this guy saying?"—

"What are you talking about, Shiki. Yuel-chan should be in the tavern right now?"

He says something ridiculous.

"Huh!?"

"Like I said, Yuel-chan's at the tavern. What, did you forget?"

I don't understand.

"Eh, what? What do you mean forget? This is the first time I'm hearing about it!"

"Y'know, back when we drank the Red Dragon Killer? Yuel said she wanted to earn some money by herself to buy you a present? She said she would work while you were asleep so she wouldn't cause you trouble, and you told her "do your best"? Man, she's a hell of a girl. Oh, by the way, I was the one who suggested she work at the tavern."

Ah, she did ask me. Or rather, she asked but I couldn't hear anything so I just nodded along. So that's what she was talking about.

Then that drunkard wasn't pointing toward the labyrinth, he was pointing toward the tavern that's in the same direction as the labyrinth.

...What the hell. It's my mistake? All the pain I went through, all the times I nearly died. I was just jumping to conclusions?

And yet, it's a relief. It may have all been for nothing, but I can relax knowing that Yuel is safe.

...No, I can't relax.

"Uh, umm, Eight-san? Gazer-san?"

"What's with the formalities, man?"

".....Please take me back to the surface?"

Chapter 17: Cleanup

Eight's party escorts me back to the entrance under the condition that I join them the next time they go hunting.

"Umm, thank you very much for today..."

Eight's group had to interrupt their hunt in order to escort me back during the twilight hours just before the break of dawn. I can't believe I recklessly charged into the labyrinth alone and had to be carried out.

...What am I, a cat that got stuck in a tree?

"Well, these things happen. Don't worry about it."

"You'll help us next time, so it's fine."

...Their kindness is killing me. I'm covered in blood, even my hair is stiff from it. One of my shoes is missing, and my clothes are full of holes. I must look like an old wet rag right about now. Considering Yuel was safe the entire time, there was no need for any of this.

"...Yeah, hit me up anytime."

I ruined an entire outfit and lost a shoe. I was in such a hurry I didn't pick up anything the monsters dropped either. I'm totally in the red. You could say it was a complete waste.

"Well hey, it's pretty gallant of you to push yourself that far for a girl's sake. Right, Geyser?"

I'm deeply moved by Eight's warm follow-up. He's a real friend.

"...It was all just a misunderstanding though, huh? Buhahhhahahahahaha!!"

"Wai, Geyser, don't laugh! ...hheh... No, it was really cool, really... heh..."

A real friend...

"Bbbbhahhahahahahaha!!"

"Hhhhhheh... ahaha..."

A real...

Geyser is openly howling with laughter while Eight is barely stifling it. The laughter only gets louder as the other adventurers start to join in.

...I wanna punch these assholes.

But, they did cut their hunt short just to bring me back. Hitting them would be ungrateful of me. No, well, after the first hit I'd be the one getting beaten. All I can do is clench my fists and endure it.

...I-I'll remember this!

Apparently Eight's group is going to call off the hunt for today and adjourn at the adventurer's guild. I want to go see for myself that Yuel is okay, but I can't show up at the tavern looking like this. I'll head back to the inn, wash up and change my clothes. Honestly, I'd rather clean off all this blood at a public bathhouse, but they probably aren't open at this time.

When I get back to the inn—

—there's a black-haired ~16-year-old girl sitting at the front desk, drowsily resting her chin on her hand, watching the entrance with lidded eyes.

"Eh, wait, blood!? A-Are you okay!?"

It's the inn's poster girl, Downblouse-san. Why do I call her Downblouse-san? 'Cause I can see down her blouse all the time. She wears loose-fitting tops and sleeps leaning on the reception desk. Her tits aren't that big, either. When she puts her hand on her chin she leans forward, and her loose clothing falls away from her small breasts. As a result, I can see her breasts right down her blouse. Therefore, she is Downblouse-san.

This inn doesn't get many customers, probably because of the location. And it's not attached to a bar so it doesn't offer any meals. A lonely inn with just the basic accommodations.

So why do I still frequent this inn? Downblouse-san here is the reason. Well, I mean, it doesn't hurt that it's significantly cheaper too.

Usually she's sleeping and I can call out to her after I get my fill of the view, but today she's already up. It's quite early. Is she diligent or lazy? I don't get her. This ditzy girl.

"Ah, I'm fine, my wounds are already healed. Sorry, but could I get some water? Preferably a lot of it."

I ask while feeling my blood-soaked clothes. The blood is already drying, so it might be too late to save these clothes. They're full of holes anyway.

"A-Are you truly unhurt? Um, well then, please wait in your room, I will bring it shortly."

"I will retrieve it later, please be careful not to spill it."

I thank Downblouse-san for bringing the washtub to my room.

I remove my clothes. Yeah, these clothes aren't usable anymore. I should just throw them out. For now, I'll stuff them into my item box.

I dip the towel in the water to start cleaning myself, then—

—I hear the sound of the door flinging open.

"Master!?"

Turning my eyes toward the door, I see Yuel standing there in a waitress uniform, out of breath.

...The skirt is shorter than I expected.

No, now is not the time. This is bad. She's back sooner than I expected from what Geyser told me. Yuel supposedly works in the tavern until around dawn.

It was my own misunderstanding, but her master went to the labyrinth to look for her and ended up in tatters. How will Yuel feel about that? In the worst case scenario she'll decide, "It's my fault that Master..."

"Are... are you hurt!?"

Seeing me all bloodied, Yuel runs over with an upset face.

"Ah, well, you see..."

How can I talk my way out of this one? If I said it was all from my enemies, that would sound kinda cool, but she'd still be worried.

"Geyser-san's group were talking about it at the tavern. That Master went looking for me by yourself in the labyrinth."

...She already found out, huh? I thought they would just make fun of me for a while, but to immediately turn it into a drinking story, I sure have some great friends.

I'll remember this.

"I'm so sorry. I-I..."

Yuel hangs her head with a forlorn expression. But it's not Yuel's fault at all. I got hurt because of my own misunderstanding. A feeling of guilt wells up in me.

"It was all my misunderstanding. Yuel did nothing wrong."

"B-But..."

"I'm just glad we're both safe. Isn't that what really matters?"

"...I guess so."

...Silence. Yuel is quiet, eyes downcast, contemplating something.

I wonder what it is? This is awkward. I dip the towel into the water and start to wipe my body.

"Master. Let me help."

Yuel takes her own towel out of her item box and soaks it in the water. She's still dressed like a waitress, though.

"Won't your uniform get dirty? It's fine, I'll do it myself."

"Ah, that's true. I'll take it off."

...Okay that's not what I was getting at.

I hear the rustling of clothes. With smooth motions, she unties her corset and removes her skirt, shirt, and slip. She's standing there in nothing but her panties. ...It would've been fine to leave the slip on.

"L-Look, I can handle this by myself, okay?"

"Your back is sticky with blood too. I need to wipe it properly or it will get on your other clothes."

Of course.

"Yuel, um, shouldn't you put something else on?"

"It would get dirty."

Of course.

She's right, I can't argue. This is a problem, though. I'm in my underwear, getting my back washed by a young girl wearing nothing but panties. Did I feel the same way on that first day after I purchased Yuel? At that time I was only focused on how thin she was, I wasn't really conscious of much else.

But Yuel has become a lot more girly compared to then. She's put on some weight, her complexion has improved, and she's softer.

Don't look. If, just if, by some infinitesimal chance,
that got like that

, Yuel might want to help me with it. I try my hardest to wipe my body without looking at Yuel.

Neither of us speaks.

I wash my hair and wipe my shoulders and arms. And then, once my back is clean—

"...Thank you very much, Master."

I suddenly feel a warmth on my back. It's Yuel, hugging me from behind. Her upper torso is bare. Through my moist skin, I feel her modest, childish swellings directly.

"I... was frightened when I heard that Master went into the labyrinth by yourself."

She hugs my lower back even tighter. I'm sure this situation wasn't her aim. That much is clear from her earnest tone of voice.

"Seeing Master like this made me sad, but also really happy. I understand how important I am to Master."

...I thought it was a waste, but it unexpectedly turned out not to be.

I've said countless kind words to her, but actions speak louder than words. She must have been worried about what would happen to her, if she would be thrown away or sold. The fact that I shed so much blood in order to find her

must have done wonders for her self-confidence. This should calm down her feelings of insecurity as well.

Thank goodness. It's such a relief.

...I'm relieved, but.

I still need to do something about this situation. We're having a serious conversation, yet I can't help but notice the various things pressing against my back. And Yuel has no intention of letting go.

This is bad. This is bad in various ways.

The longer this silence goes on, the harder it will be to say anything.

"A-Anyway, how are things at the tavern?"

"There are a lot of nice people. My senpai waitresses, the kouhai I got today, everyone's nice to me, so it's fun. It's all thanks to Master!"

No, I'm pretty sure it's thanks to your personality, Yuel-san. I doubt it has much to do with me. No matter what I do, it feels like eventually somehow you'll give me credit. Your respect feels more like religious reverence.

"T-That reminds me, about how long do you work?"

This is something I have to ask. Yuel has been working while I'm asleep. Which means there's a good chance she's not getting a decent amount of sleep herself.

"Ummm, they are always short-staffed, so I was told to come whenever. Today I worked since 4 hours before dawn or so."

Is that alright? Let's say dawn is at 5am, that means she's been working since 1am. And it takes time to get ready, so she probably has to get up by midnight. We went to sleep in the evening yesterday, so she got 6 hours of sleep at best?

If that's how it usually is, then she's not getting enough sleep. But she looked so happy when she talked about the tavern, so I can't just tell her to quit. And I already gave her my permission, apparently. Hmm, what should I do?

"Could you change your working hours? Like to the evening. That's usually when I go to the tavern anyway."

"Then I wouldn't be able to stay by Master's side."

"...But you aren't getting much sleep like this, are you?"

Yuel's head droops. She doesn't have time to sleep after all.

"You know, Yuel, that uniform looks really good on you. I'd like to see you work while wearing it. But I can't do that late at night, right?"

"I-It... looks good on me?"

Yuel lets go of me and starts to put on the waitress uniform. ...F-Finally I'm free.

"Yeah, I was thinking of giving Yuel a skirt as a present before today. But, if I can see you wearing a skirt in the tavern every evening, I'd be happy to buy you something else you want?"

"S-Something I want...? ...Umm, I will try to discuss my hours with the barmaster."

To be honest, it feels like Yuel would be happy no matter what I gave her, which makes it hard to choose. On the other hand, Yuel rarely talks about what she wants for herself. I should make use of this opportunity. Frankly, I have no desire to enter the labyrinth today, so I'd be fine spending the whole day shopping.

While I'm thinking about it, I hear a knock at the door.

"Here is some additional water, once you are done please bring it down or leave it in the room as is."

The voice of the inn's poster girl, Downblouse-san, calls out.

Upon hearing that, Yuel notices. That we've only wiped the upper half of my body.

"I'll help with the lower half too."

".....I'll do it myself."

Chapter 18: Shopping

After somehow managing to fend off Yuel's help while washing all the caked blood off of my lower body, we head to the tavern.

I speak to the barmaster about possibly changing Yuel's working hours. And the result is—

"If possible I'd like to have her keep working the late night shift for one more week, will that be a problem?"

The barmaster says with a fatigued expression.

The barmaster is a fairly stylish middle-aged man with thin, swept-back hair and a refined atmosphere. Not so much today, though. His image is marred by deep circles under his glazed eyes. He looks utterly exhausted.

"I try to be flexible about schedule changes, but recently a number of staff have quit due to marriage, moving or whatnot. We're terribly understaffed, particularly late at night."

"You do look pretty tired."

I can tell from the dark circles under his eyes that he hasn't been getting much sleep either. To manage a business while short-handed, the employees work day and night to make up for it.

It's a common story in Japan, too. This man knows the pain of the working class.

"...Ah, these dark circles? I asked my wife for some S&M play yesterday and she left me tied up all night in a painful position and I couldn't sleep, so, they're unrelated."

Nevermind, he's just a pervert. Despite the refined atmosphere, this barmaster laughingly admitted something like that. I'm not so sure I'm comfortable leaving Yuel at a tavern run by a guy like this. Maybe I should make her quit after all.

...Although, I haven't heard any mention of him putting his hands on the

waitresses, and above all, Yuel herself wants to work here. Plus he's married; I'm sure it's fine. When Yuel asks what S&M play is, I pat her head and change the subject.

"Ah, aren't you hiring new waitresses?"

"We are, but not many have applied."

"This place pays pretty well, doesn't it? I thought the townswomen would be flooding in."

This tavern has many cute waitresses. That is to say, it only has cute waitresses. The pay is better in order to maintain that, or so I've heard.

"I earned a thousand Zeni today!"

Yuel says while smiling from ear to ear. This must be what it feels like for a grandparent to give their grandkid a little pocket money. That's great! Pat pat.

But really, 1000 Zeni in a few hours. That's quite high. Comparing it to Japan, it's probably around what a maid makes hourly at a maid cafe.

"Yes, they did, but there weren't many cute ones. Only Yuel and one other girl made the cut. We still don't have enough staff... Working while surrounded by cute girls has always been my dream, it's the one thing I don't want to compromise on."

As a man, I don't know whether to admire that or shout "Are you kidding me!?" ...No, it might not be a bad policy for a bar. After all, I myself kept coming here because of the cute miniskirt waitress. It's absolutely not something a middle-aged married man should be saying, though.

"Just for one week, would that be okay?"

What to do. Since he's letting me use his tavern for free for my treatment stall, it's hard to say no. I suppose I could let my biological rhythm slip a bit. If we leave the tavern in the early evening like yesterday and go right to bed, there wouldn't be any issue with Yuel getting enough sleep.

"I'm fine with that!"

Yuel is willing, too. Oh well, I'll go with the flow. It's just for one week.

While we have breakfast at the bar, I think over our plans for today. Usually we'd go to the labyrinth, but in all honesty I don't want to do that today. I especially don't want to see any Giant Ants. My mental scars will start aching. Yuel may be all enthusiastic about "I'll work even harder from now on!" but I think I'm going to make today a holiday.

What should I do? Oh yeah, this morning Yuel reacted when I offered to buy her whatever she wanted.

"Why don't we go shopping today? There's something you want, right?"

Apparently Yuel did have something she wanted to buy. While I was still finishing my meal, she ran around asking the waitresses which shops they would recommend. Hey, why don't you introduce them to me sometime?

"Master, this way!"

Yuel tugs on my hand as we walk down the main street. She's smiling from the bottom of her heart. Ignoring the carts along the road, ignoring the grocers, even passing up the weapon shop with a wistful expression, she steadily marches along.

And then, we arrive.

At a women's lingerie shop.

...Hold on.

"*This* is the place where you wanted to come, Yuel?"

"Yes, right here."

Still grinning, looking right at this underwear store that has a bit of an upscale feel. Apparently it's not a mistake.

"Yuel, you can get whatever you want, you know? It can't be too expensive, but an accessory or some pretty clothes would be fine. Or a yummy pastry, maybe some perfume? Ahh, a cute stuffed animal would be nice too. Right, isn't there some other place that would suit you better?"

"Here is fine."

Is it.

Frankly, I don't want to go inside. Even from the outside I feel an atmosphere of "no men allowed". A man like me will stick out like a sore thumb in such a place. The only men who would enter are the ones who consider themselves to be female. I really don't want to go inside.

Peeking in through the entrance, a variety of beautifully decorated undergarments enter my view. Women in their teens and 20s are exchanging intimate conversations with underwear in hand. Underwear, women, underwear, women.

I want to go in..... no, I don't. I can't do it, the way they're looking at me is too painful.

Perhaps picking up on my thoughts, Yuel says "Master, please help me choose" and drags me along by the arm into the store with her. Now what? Nobody wants a man barging into their ladies-only lingerie store.

The clerk shows a look of surprise upon seeing me enter, but once she notices Yuel next to me she goes back to dealing with the other customers. I guess there's no problem. I glance around the store, but I don't see any other men in here. I'd have been fine with them driving me away, but for some reason they overlook me.

...That's right, I'm merely chaperoning a little girl on her shopping trip right now.

As her guardian. There's nothing to feel guilty about. Or even if we don't look like parent and child, we could be brother and sister. Yes, siblings. My little sister wanted to buy underwear but couldn't go by herself, so I had to accompany her. Let's go with that.

If I think of Yuel (who's still dragging me by the arm) as my little sister...

I take a look at Yuel. Light brown skin, blue eyes, and shimmering silver hair with elven ears sticking out. Yeah, not happening. In the first place, we're not even the same race.

"Master, let's look over there."

That way of addressing me is no good either. No matter how you look at it, we can only be seen as master and slave.

...But that's not a problem. She may be a slave, but I really am just accompanying a little girl on her shopping trip. I'm getting a few stares on account of being a man, but I don't feel any outright scorn. Right, there shouldn't be any problem with this.

"Master, what do you think of this one?"

While I'm thinking, Yuel brings over a single garment. She bashfully smiles up at me while holding the lingerie up to her body.

It's a chic violet number adorned with lovely lace. A female-only type of sleepwear known as negligee. The fabric is soft and thin, so I'm sure it's very comfortable to sleep in. No problems here.

Other than the fact that it's so thin that you can totally see through it.

Yeah, when Yuel holds the lacy violet negligee up to her body, her clothes are clearly visible behind it. How can you even call this product "clothing"? It completely fails to hide one's skin or regulate temperature.

You'll catch a cold, Yuel-san.

Lingerie is sleepwear. Yuel has always worn a shirt and pants of normal thickness when we go to sleep together, but from now on she'd be wearing this? That seems a little unsavory. I feel like the looks from around the room are getting colder, too.

A 12-year-old girl is looking over at me, holding a transparent negligee up to her body and grinning.

Nevermind, I can't do this. If you ask me what I can't handle about it, it would mostly be these looks I'm getting from around the room. As the other women notice Yuel holding up the negligee, they start to whisper. Even under normal circumstances they'd be suspicious of male customers.

From their perspective, I'm a lolicon dressing up a little girl in vulgar outfits. If Yuel were holding childish drawers then maybe it would be a heartwarming scene, but what she's holding is unquestionably a sheer lace negligee.

How did it end up like this?

"Master, it doesn't look good on me?"

While I'm trying to endure the looks from around the room, Yuel becomes dejected when she doesn't get a positive response from me. Whether it suits you or not, please put it back on the shelf already! But I can't leave Yuel disappointed.

"...It's not bad, but something cute might look better on you."

"Cute...? ...Umm, in that case, how about this one?"

Yuel places the violet negligee back on the shelf and picks up the item next to it. Then she holds it up to her body.

A cute, see-through pink negligee.

...All you did was change the color though. You really like transparent negligees, huh? I'm getting the feeling that she had already decided what to buy before we got here.

"Yuel, why do you want that negligee so much?"

"Umm, Geyser-san said if I wanted to get along better with Master then I should pick something li" You are not to listen to that man anymore."

Eventually, we settle on an ordinary, opaque negligee.

Since then, we've been going into the labyrinth in the morning, relaxing at the tavern in the afternoon, and returning to the inn in the evening to sleep. From late night until early morning, Yuel goes to work at the tavern. That's roughly how we spend the day.

Several days pass like that.

Lately, Yuel's daily routine is to talk about her work while we're having breakfast at the tavern. How she made friends with one waitress, or how another waitress turned the tables on an unruly hooligan. There's also stuff like what the other waitresses like, the things they do on their days off, what guys are their type, whether they have lovers, and so on. It's extremely useful information.

But today it's a bit different.

"One of the waitresses I work with is having money issues. She even had to sell her house. She was having trouble picking an inn so I told her about the one

we're staying at."

That's a pretty heavy story. The inn we're staying at costs 500 Zeni per night. There's no bath, just a clean room with a lock and key. It's certainly a good recommendation for a girl who's down on her luck.

"Huh, I guess waitresses have it tough too."

"Yes. She told me she works at a hospital during the day and the tavern at night, but it still wasn't enough to repay her debt."

A hospital that's struggling with business. That story sounds familiar somehow. Wait, no way.

"...Just wondering, but what's the name of that waitress?"

"Umm... Eris-san."

Chapter 19: Reunion

Did she just say Eris? Maybe I misheard her. Or rather, I really hope I misheard her.

"...Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Could you repeat it?"

"It's Eris-san."

...Nope, I didn't mishear anything.

It has to be *that*

Eris. No no, Eris is a popular name. It could still be someone else. There could be some other Eris in some other completely unrelated hospital.

"What kind of person is this Eris-san?"

"Umm, she's pretty, she has blonde hair, and she's really nice."

It's probably her.

"But she made a really scary face one time when she kicked out a drunkard."

That's Eris.

"What else, umm... oh, she has really big boobs!"

Yeah, it's definitely Eris.

It seems the waitress who had to sell her house due to debt is none other than *that* Eris.

But, this is the first time I'm hearing that Eris was in debt. Her hospital didn't have a lot of money, but it's a hospital after all. All you need for a hospital is a single healer and a building.

Of course, if a typical healer treats many patients in a row, they'll run out of mana, and treating a severe injury could deplete all of their mana at once, so large-scale hospitals employ as many healers as possible.

However, the only other person who was working at Eris' hospital was me. It was a small hospital made from a remodeled house. The debt couldn't possibly be from employee wages.

Moreover, I heard that Eris inherited the hospital from her parents who operated it for many years. Eris herself wouldn't have inherited a large debt from the construction. Has she been paying the property tax?

Running a hospital under those circumstances, what could possibly make her run up so much debt that she had no choice but to sell it? No matter how bad the location is or how few customers come, Eris' living expenses aren't that high. Also, when I was working there, Eris was getting more customers than she could handle on her own.

Is it possible that my treatment clinic stole some of her business? No, besides Ruruka there were only 2-3 customers who I'd seen at Eris' place before. ...I don't know if Ruruka could really be considered a customer, anyway.

Also, I haven't made my prices as low as the ones at Eris' hospital, so the quality of clientele I attract is different. It's pretty far away too. Such a minor amount of competition shouldn't have been enough to impact her hospital's bottom line.

"Yuel, do you know how long Eris has been working at that tavern?"

"Umm, since the day after I started."

So it was just before she sold the hospital? Did Eris decide to sell the hospital first and then decide on the tavern as her next job? Or was she desperately trying to put together enough money so she wouldn't have to sell the hospital?

"Do you know where Eris is right now?"

"We went to the inn together after work, so I assume she's still there. Um, is she an acquaintance of Master?"

You can certainly say that. This is Eris, who gave me a job when I had just arrived in this other world. Who taught me common sense while eying me suspiciously when I declared that I came from a faraway land. Our relationship can't be summed up by a mere word like, "acquaintance". Maybe I shouldn't be saying this after she tossed me out for sexual harassment, but it feels right.

"Eris is my benefactor."

We leave the tavern and return to the inn.

Yuel apparently knows which room Eris is staying in, so I have her guide me there. From the corner room on the second floor, one room over.

...It's right next door to the room Yuel and I are staying at.

Yuel knocks on the door.

"Eris-san, are you there?"

Yuel calls out, and the door soon opens. A beautiful girl with shoulder-length blonde hair comes out. At 18, she has a slightly mature demeanor and a bursting bust. Without a doubt, it's Eris.

"Oh, it's Yuel-chan. What's the matter? Didn't you say you were going to the labyrinth with your master today?"

"Umm, it seems Master has something to discuss with you."

Eris greets Yuel with a sweet voice and pats her head— then she sees me standing at a distance.

"I-It's been a while..."

"...What brings you here?"

In contrast to the sweet voice she used with Yuel, her tone toward me is icy cold. Where did those kind eyes you were showing to Yuel go, I wonder? Your pointed gaze is practically a glare. I guess you're still angry, huh.

"Eris-san, he is my master!"

Yuel is all smiles.

She's sticking out her (lack of) chest with pride.

Eris smiles sweetly at Yuel once again— then walks right up to my face and speaks in a low voice.

"...Yuel-chan told me her master was an honest, kind, respectable person. So why the hell is she calling someone like you, "Master"?"

"B-But I really am h... n-no, nevermind."

Please stop giving me that look from point-blank range. You could kill someone with that glare alone, Eris-san.

"Haaaa, for you to lay your hands on such a small girl..."

I'm getting treated as a lolicon again, huh? If you're going to criticize my daily behavior I can't argue though.

"I've done no such thing! I'm an adventurer now, so we enter the labyrinth together."

"Adventurer... I'm just kidding. Yuel-chan even said how happy she was that her master treasures her. So, why are you here?"

I thought for sure I was going to get the lolicon treatment, but apparently not. Moreover, she's willing to talk. She's definitely still mad, but she's probably cooled off for the most part.

"You're working at the tavern, right? I heard that you had to sell the hospital."

"...That has nothing to do with you."

Eris averts her gaze slightly.

"Lately, I've been offering treatment at the tavern."

"...I may have been getting many fewer customers lately, but that has nothing to do with it. Things just went back to the way they were before I hired you."

The way things were before she hired me. She didn't have many customers to begin with, so business only picked up while I was there? And business suffered after I quit...

"Even if you hadn't come... I was planning to sell that house before spring. Even with you there, it was failing anyway and I couldn't afford to pay you a fair wage. It was doomed to fail. Of course I'm mad about your "discounts" and the bathing incident, but none of this is your responsibility. I decided on this from the beginning."

But if I had continued to work there, couldn't she have held out for longer?

"But still..."

"I didn't ever tell you this, but I have a younger sister. She's aiming to become a knight. 3 years ago, just before our parents died in an accident, she entered the Royal Knight Academy. She was determined to come back as a knight no

matter what. But, when our parents died I was left alone, and the customers left in droves. I'm not as skilled as my parents were... I went into debt to pay for her tuition and allowance. So, it doesn't involve you."

She had a younger sister? I never knew... but I suppose Eris isn't one to reveal her own weaknesses. I guess she didn't want me to feel sorry for her or to buy my sympathy.

Eris' hospital was originally owned by her parents. It was doing well enough at the time to pay for tuition, so they sent their younger daughter off to the knight academy. But shortly after, Eris' parents died in an accident. The only one left was Eris, with less mana than the average healer. Abandoned by the customers, the hospital could no longer pay for her sister's tuition or living expenses. So their savings dwindled as she kept sending her sister money. The savings dried up, and Eris had to start borrowing money using the hospital as collateral. The debt kept growing, and I showed up just as things were getting desperate. Eris had already decided to sell the hospital, but upon seeing my proficiency with healing magic she might have entertained thoughts of reviving the business. Or maybe she just employed me because she felt pity for me in my jobless and clueless state. But in the end, she got fed up and fired me due to the sexual harassment. Then for the second time, business suffered and she lost any hope of repaying the debt, so she gave up on the hospital as she had originally intended. I'm just guessing, but it's probably something along those lines.

"Did you pay off all the debt?"

If she's late on the debt, it's possible that she'll be sold to a slave trader by her creditor and forced to become a servant. If she hasn't paid back all the debt yet, I have to help her.

"The auction for the hospital will take place in a week. It shouldn't go for anything lower than 1 million Zeni, and that would cover the debt. My sister's tuition is already paid in full, so that's not a problem anymore."

"How much is the debt itself? S-Say, if you didn't have to sell the hospital, as much as I can, I'd like to..."

When I say that, Eris chuckles—

"It's not something you need to worry about. The hospital was going to be

sold whether you were there or not. I don't have any lingering attachment to it. I'm fine. I'll search for some other hospital to apply to while I'm working at the tavern."

She says that in a tender voice, then returns to her room.

After talking to Eris, I don't feel much like going to the labyrinth, so I spend some time at the inn thinking about Eris.

About how Eris' hospital will be auctioned off in a week. That the proceeds should supposedly be over a million Zeni. And the fact that she has a sister going to a knight academy.

She says she intends to sell the hospital, yet she's going out of her way to work late at night at the tavern. It gives me the impression that she doesn't want to give up on the hospital until the last moment.

...I bet she wanted to hold on until her younger sister's return, to the hospital their parents left them.

I lean against the wall and think about what to do next. If possible, I want to attend the auction and prevent anyone else from buying Eris' hospital. I could lend Eris the money, but I doubt that she would accept becoming indebted to me.

The only way for me to prevent Eris' hospital from falling into someone else's hands at the auction is to buy it myself. But to make over a million Zeni in a week, in the worst case 1.5 to 2 million Zeni, is too much to ask. Between adventuring and healing, my total daily earnings are around 7000 Zeni.

The only way I could make that much money would be to get in touch with rich nobles and merchants and perform EX Heal. But I have no proof that I'm trustworthy. I don't have a title with a court rank like Bishop or Archbishop, nor have I studied at any church. If such a person approached you claiming to be able to use EX Heal, you would assume he's a charlatan.

Besides, if a rich person gets severely injured they will go to the church right away and pay an eminent priest to get treated. To find someone who's rich and injured but hasn't been treated yet, there's no way I can do that when I have no connections.

I can't come up with any method to earn a lot of money. But I have to think of one. Yes, within a week.

Eris might not know this since she just came to this inn, but the walls are thin. I'm only leaning against the wall, but the sounds from the next room are mostly audible. Eris said she had no lingering attachment to the hospital.

And yet. ...Why then.

Why, on the other side of the wall, do I hear Eris crying?

Chapter 20: Moneymaking

...Thinking back on it, Eris had always been nice to me.

–For example, the time when she hired me.

"...There's no helping it. That Heal was incredible... Well, I'll be counting on you from now on."

When I shamelessly pleaded on my hands and knees, half out of desperation for a job and half with an ulterior motive, Eris gave in and accepted me with a kind smile despite her concerns.

–For example, the first time I sexually harassed her.

"T-That wasn't on purpose, right? ...Honestly, be more careful, ok?"

The first time I “accidentally” brushed Eris’ ass and she laughingly forgave me. Eris was nice then, too. That novice reaction tinged with a little shyness excited me.

–For example, the Nth time I sexually harassed her.

"...There won't be a next time."

Her voice was cold. But still, Eris didn't kick me out. She understood my character, and she may have sent me a death glare, but when I prostrated myself and sang her praises she eventually forgave me in the end.

Then the day before I was thrown out–

On the other side of the door that was slightly ajar as if to tempt me. The room with a tiled floor that only contained a tub and a drain certainly used to be a bathroom. But the magic item for generating hot water had already been sold due to the debt, and the tub that wasn't designed to be heated by firewood could no longer be called a proper bath.

The splashing of water was faintly audible, coming from that place that was only good for swimming.

In my wild delusions, it was a foregone conclusion that as a man I would impulsively peep into that room.

–On the other side of that door swam the body of Eris. Indeed, it was the Garden of Eden.

You could say it was inevitable that I would throw caution to the wind, and “accidentally” burst in

and stumble onto her chest.

"Just how badly, HOW BADLY do you want me to kick you out...?"

Eris had veins popping out of her forehead and was looking at me with a level of rage that was unbecoming of a girl.

She only kicked me out after I had saved up enough money to get back on my feet. That probably wasn't a coincidence, either.

"Master..."

As I was thinking, Yuel gazed up at me as if she had something to tell me. I already know what she's thinking. They've only been working together as waitresses for a short time, but Yuel has become extremely fond of Eris.

"Shall we go buy back Eris' hospital for her?"

"...! Yes, Master!"

After spending some time in thought, I had come up with a few methods.

The first thing I have to do is get Yuel to work at the tavern. In order to allow me to move on my own.

"Yuel, we're going to need some more money in order to buy Eris' hospital. I'd like you to go to work for a bit at that tavern that's always short-handed. I'll come pick you up in the evening."

Well then, let's get this over quickly.

"You're not getting away! Follow him! Pulling that shit on our turf, you're gonna wish you were dead!!"

"Had my doubts about that confidence, but he really fuckin' tried it! Like hell he's getting away!"

"Shit, how can he run so fast!? You guys, over there! Cut him off!"

So, as a result of trying to get it over with— I'm currently being chased.

In order to make money quickly, I went to... a gambling house, operated by some rather unsavory gentlemen.

In this country where gambling has been outlawed, it's a fairly underground business. In a gaming room on the 2nd floor of a bar on the outskirts of town, a number of people hide their faces and identities and amuse themselves by gambling... or so I've heard.

There, they've set up a gambling ring with something similar to playing cards. A simple game where whether you win or lose depends on whether the drawn card is higher or lower than the one on the table. It's a betting game where the rate of return ultimately lands in favor of the bookie. However... that's right, I had a handy ability known as Appraisal.

And then— naturally, I was caught by a magical tool that detects analysis skills.

It would appear that they have perfect countermeasures against swindlers.

"Hahhh... haaahhh..."

I can't rest my legs. I have to keep running.

It was the moment where I had to pick higher or lower after placing my bet. The minute that I activated Appraisal in order to ascertain the value of the top card on the deck, a shrill alarm rang out through the building. The dealer, who was using some kind of magic tool, turned to face me. Since I was clearly guilty, I braced myself and leapt through the second-story window.

Somehow I was able to escape from the premises. But I'm still being chased by some scary men. What's more, they're about to surround me.

Repeatedly casting Heal on my legs, I can maintain a constant sprint, but I still can't seem to shake them. I guess thugs who run an illegal gambling ring get a good workout. It's not just that I'm not in shape, my legs are fine thanks to Heal, but I'm running out of-out of breath. Healing magic won't help with a lack of oxygen.

"There he is! Over there!!"

A bunch of ruffians come running from up ahead. They're still chasing me

from behind too.

Not good, so not good. I-I only consider it for a second, but there's no way they would forgive me like Eris. If I get caught, only corporal punishment awaits. I could try shaking them off by running down an alley, but there are so many of them. They'd catch up with me soon enough.

"Get him! Geeeet hiiiim!!"

I enter a side street to evade them. Isn't there something, anything I can do? I search my item box as I run.

There's a hard metal sensation— it's my mace. ...No good, I have no chance of winning in a fight, and no desire to fight in the first place.

A hooded cloth— my bloodstained habit. ...I forgot to throw that out.

And then— a squishy sensation.

That's it! I turn the next corner and scatter the item I just grabbed along the narrow alleyway.

—Yes, it's Slime Jelly.

It's the Slime Jelly I've been saving up instead of selling. I fill up the narrow alleyway with a large quantity of it. A short distance later, I hear screaming and shouting behind me. No doubt they slipped and fell when they tried to run over it.

I'm so glad I have you, Slime Jelly.

Dropping Slime Jelly after Slime Jelly as I run through the streets, I finally manage to shake them. I had to run for an extremely long time, but I got away.

...However, this was a failure.

I was trying to make money, but the 500 Zeni from the bet was a total loss, and my Slime Jelly stockpile has drastically diminished. I should have thought about it some more, but why did I even try something like this? I was so impatient that I lost sight of myself.

I have time. I can still think of ways to make money. Next time, next time for sure.

This time, I'll head to the slave market. It's something I came up with when I saw Yuel.

That's right, I can make a huge profit by buying injured slaves, healing them, and reselling them.

I still had some resistance to the idea of trading slaves for the sake of making money, so I was putting it off, but then again I can choose which slaves to buy. Picking a suitable older guy wouldn't particularly hurt my conscience. An older guy would probably be grateful just to have his injuries healed.

And then, heading to the slave market—

"We don't normally stock damaged goods, so..."

"Injured slaves? I ain't got any. Got a healer who treats 'em for me on the cheap."

"*You*

can use EX Heal? Gimme a break. Ain't no way a shabby guy like you is a high-ranking priest."

—A complete disappointment. Nobody with those qualifications would ever be caught in a slave market asking around for severely injured slaves.

Apparently Yuel was an extremely rare case. The slave trade wouldn't be interested in buying people with low resale value in the first place. Probably because of the maintenance costs involved in keeping slaves.

This was a fool's errand.

Going to the gambling den, running my legs off, then coming to the slave market for no harvest. I ended up wasting a lot of time. It's almost evening. It'll be time to pick up Yuel soon.

After today, there will only be 6 days left until the auction for Eris' hospital.

"Master!"

When I enter the tavern, Yuel comes running over to me. She looks adorable as a waitress.

"Master, I got a lot of money today too! ...Umm, for buying Eris' hospital? I

want to make Eris happy too. So..."

Making such a pure remark, Yuel pulls out her bank card filled with thousands of Zeni. I would feel seriously guilty taking the money that Yuel worked hard to earn here, for such an admirable cause, after I just lost my betting money trying to fleece some gamblers.

"P-Please hold onto that for now, Yuel."

I want to answer those feelings. But the two methods I thought up today ended up in failure.

What should we do tomorrow? Enter the labyrinth and search for treasure chests? I heard that many of them contain high-priced magic items. The most extreme get-rich-quick schemes are probably in the labyrinth.

...Yeah, but I haven't come across a single treasure chest yet in all the time I've spent in the labyrinth. I feel like it would be impossible to find one within a single week. But in that case, what should we...

"Yo, Shiki, got a minute?"

A voice breaks my train of thought. It's Geyser. Eight's there by his side, too. I notice a trickle of blood running from Geyser's hand. He's here for medical treatment, huh?

"What's the matter, Geyser? Need healing? One Heal is 400 Zeni y'know?"

"Nah, it's just a scratch, I'm fine. On my way here there was Slime Jelly all over the streets for some reason and I slipped and fell."

...I-I'm so sorry.

"H-Hey, it was just a joke. I can't possibly accept money from you guys, right? Heal."

I'll definitely collect on it later.

"Oh, seriously? Thanks man. That's not why we're here, though. We came to collect on the loan for taking you back to the surface."

"The loan?"

Oh right, they did say something about having me join their next trip in

exchange.

"You got it, Shiki. Can you come to the labyrinth with us tomorrow?"

"Sure, hunting slimes?"

"Well, sorta—"

To be honest, I want to tell them I'll go slime hunting with them some other time. Right now I want to get rich quick. But I can't turn them down at this point. I told them they could call on me at any time. And the odds may be low, but it's possible we could find a treasure chest while we're hunting slimes.

"—If that's what it was, we could handle it by ourselves. We're not talking normal slimes here."

Eight grins as he says that. If it's not normal slimes, that means...

"Huge Slime."

Chapter 21: Boss Battle

"By Huge Slime, you mean the boss of the 7th floor? Can we beat it with just us?"

Huge Slime, the boss of the 7th floor, has a body diameter of 3m. Eight and Geyser are both skilled with longswords, but compared to Yuel, I can't say their movements are particularly sharp or that they're especially competent. How should I put it? They're just

okay with their weapons. To an average degree.

"We've beaten it once before. Remember, the party members that were there when we escorted you, Shiki?"

Eight speaks.

"Ah, back then, huh?"

Now that I think about it, there was a wizard in Eight's party, too. I guess when I went into the labyrinth to find Yuel it wasn't an accident that I ran into Eight's group in front of the boss room. They must have been taking a break after hunting the boss.

"But if you can beat it without me, what's the point of bringing me along?"

"Well, we were supposed to go with the same members this time too, but... although it's a slime, a boss is a boss, so even though we managed to defeat it we still took some damage. We had to use some expensive potions, so we lost money overall. That's why we're asking you to heal, Shiki."

"I see, that makes sense."

So, they want to save on potion costs. Potions are a type of healing medicine. Depending on their effectiveness, they can probably get pretty expensive.

...Be that as it may, Huge Slime huh? Its rare drop, Slime Drop, goes for 200,000 Zeni since it's an ingredient for some expensive magic potion. Depending on how long it takes to beat it and the drop rate, we could potentially make a huge profit.

But, if we go after the boss tomorrow, the problem is Yuel. To be honest I doubt she would be very effective against this boss. With her small build and reliance on knives, it would be hard to face off against the massive Huge Slime. I feel like it would be best to leave her behind while she's working at the tavern.

"Yuel, about tomorrow..."

And then, when I look over to ask Yuel to stay behind—

Yuel is looking back at me with sparkling eyes that clearly say "I'm looking forward to tomorrow, Master!" Well aren't you all fired up, Yuel-san. It seems she was paying close attention to our conversation.

This is no good. This is exactly what I was afraid would happen. Yuel's smile doesn't show the slightest shadow of a doubt that she's coming with us tomorrow. But Yuel is staying behind this time.

Well, but... how can I say "you're staying behind" to such a radiant smile?

"I'm looking forward to tomorrow, Master!"

I can't say it.

How could I possibly say "You're useless so wait here" to such a genuine smile?

...No, I need to harden my heart at times like these. Bringing Yuel with us will only be putting her at risk.

"Yuel, sorry, but..."

And as soon as I make up my mind and call out to Yuel—

"Ah, not just Shiki. It's better if Yuel-chan can come too."

Geyser butts in. What the hell?

"...Is that really necessary?"

"Well, attacks aren't gonna reach the Huge Slime's core unless we prune it down bit by bit, but once it gets smaller it starts moving pretty fast. Faster than normal slimes, y'know? She doesn't have to fight it from the start, but we wanna leave the last step to her. Yuel-chan's really skilled on top of being nimble, so she'd be able to handle it. It's not like its attacks are gonna reach the

back row, so don't worry."

Apparently he had a good reason. As long as she doesn't have to fight it from the beginning, it should be fine. The danger for her is its size. If she only takes on the Huge Slime once it's smaller, there shouldn't be any problem.

Plus if Yuel comes we'll get a larger portion of the rewards. From the perspective of earning money, maybe it's better to let her come.

The next day, Eight brings along the same members I met in the labyrinth. There's one man wielding a cane and four who appear to be tanks. I didn't really notice it last time, but they all kinda give off a ruffian atmosphere. Birds of a feather flock together, I suppose. Yuel will be my only comfort.

With these five as party members, we progress smoothly through the labyrinth, and make it to the 6th floor. And then—

""Eeeeeeeek...!""

Eight and I shriek in unison. In the middle of the 6th floor, we turn a corner and run into a group of five Giant Ants. Their mandibles are crunching in anticipation of their prey.

I flash back to the time when my leg was bitten off. Since then, no matter how many times I enter the labyrinth my heart beats out of my chest when I suddenly encounter them. Evidently Eight feels the same way. It was probably just as traumatic for him as it was for me.

"Ah, these guys got you too, Shiki? Yeah, Giant Ant leg bites are the most common severe injury around these parts, y'see."

Geyser proclaims heartily. Who cares about that now, just kill them already.

"Oh yeah, someone I know got caught by these guys just the other day. They don't have much money though so they can't get it treated. Hey Priest-san, I'm a little short, won'tcha just heal me real quick? Ain't got no money though, hahahahahaha."

Ruffian A adds his anecdote. Stop laughing and kill them.

"Meh, not like I'd care so long as they paid me back in the end."

Treating wounded adventurers. This could be used for networking. I could

have Eight and Geyser introduce me to their acquaintances, and do the same with the adventurers I heal at my treatment stall.

But the type of adventurers who would get severely injured on lower floors, particularly by Giant Ants, wouldn't save up much money. Ignoring Yuel's abnormally high combat skill, novice adventurers wear down their weapons and get hurt while fighting. The costs of things like weapon maintenance, potions and healing magic become a huge burden.

There aren't many healers who can do treatment for deferred payment, so the market price is high. But I won't make any money where there is none. Plus, adventuring is a hazardous occupation, and collecting on debts will be difficult. I need money right away in order to buy Eris' hospital, but this could serve as a steady source of income in the future.

"Oh, really? If you say so. Alright, I'll let 'em know."

"Oh, in that case can I ask for my buddy too? On credit, of course."

Piggybacking on Ruffian A, Ruffian B speaks up.

"...The payment may be deferred but I'll hold you to it."

As far as deferred payment is concerned, the average healer's magic power can't cover very many heals per day. For a healer, it's their precious source of income. And living in this labyrinth city, there's a constant flow of injured people. That's why the average healer doesn't accept deferred payment. But as for me, I don't have to hold back on treatment out of concern for running out of magic power when I need it later. There's not much of a downside for me if I accept deferred payment.

I'm not exactly confident that the colleagues of these goons will follow through on the fee after the fact, though.

Anyway, we manage to make it to the boss room on the 7th floor.

"All right, get ready."

On Geyser's words, the ruffians take out large shields from their item boxes. They're tall, rectangular shields made of metal. "Tower shield" would probably be the closest description. Eight and Geyser also put away their weapons and

take out tower shields.

"Same simple strategy as before. First, we concentrate on stopping the Huge Slime's attacks. Once it's immobilized we shave it down with magic. Then repeat."

Geyser goes over the battle plan, but... it's such a reckless strategy.

"Oi oi, is that really safe?"

Honestly, how much of a musclehead are you?

"It's fine. We just have to block its first attack and hit it with magic, then the Huge Slime will only get smaller and we can repeat the same strategy. We mainly need to be careful with that first attack. If that plan for the first hit fails, there's the possibility of getting badly injured, but if that happens you can heal us right away."

How we handle the first attack will decide the outcome. Those tower shields must be for the sake of reliably defending against that max-power first hit. Well, if we can win safely then everything's good.

"Alright, got it."

"Should be fine with this many people."

"Now then, everyone ready?"

Eight calls out with his hand on the boss door, and everyone nods.

"Let's do this!"

Geyser boldly shouts as the door opens. A vast room lies beyond. It's huge, 30m in every dimension.

And at the center is a slime. A slime as big as a wagon wheel, jiggling in place.

"Line up in a single rank! Here we go!"

The six tanks line up alongside each other and raise their shields. At roughly the same time, the slime stops quivering and begins to roll forward with a rumbling sound. It must be due to a slime's characteristic hardening at the moment it attacks.

It doesn't bounce around like a normal slime, probably due to its weight, but

even so it seems like it has a lot of momentum. It gives off the impression of a car speeding toward us.

Aaand, it's a direct hit.

The hardened slime makes a loud, dull thud as it hits the metal. The shield-bearing front line flexes severely. That must have been quite an impact.

Nevertheless, the tower shield formation properly halts the Huge Slime's charge.

Not surprisingly, many of them are holding their arms in pain. They must have taken some considerable damage. From the impact just now, I wouldn't be surprised if there were bone fractures. It's like making a wall out of meat.

"Area Heal!"

I heal the tanks with an area-of-effect spell. It's a low-difficulty healing spell that heals multiple targets at the expense of consuming more magic power. It's not any stronger than Heal, but that's good enough for simple bone fractures.

Man, this strategy is simple, but it's surprisingly effective. Receiving the Huge Slime's charge solo could easily be fatal, but with that formation the damage is properly distributed across all of the members. They're guaranteed to take damage this way, but the overall risk is much lower than if everyone tried to fight the Huge Slime separately while dodging its attacks. If they take a little damage, it can be cured with healing magic, and moreover I'm the one healing. I'm inexhaustible. For once, Geyser actually thought things through, somehow.

"Fireball!"

The wizard finishes his cast at the same time my healing magic goes out. He fires off a blazing orb the size of a soccer ball at the Huge Slime.

A part of the Huge Slime explodes and its body bursts apart. It quickly reforms, but it seems about 10% smaller than it used to be.

Before the huge slime recovers from the magic, the tanks get back into formation and raise their shields.

After that the fight follows the same pattern.

As the Huge Slime gets smaller, its attack weakens. The multiple tanks have

no trouble restraining it, and we fire magic at it.

In the end, Yuel throws a knife to defeat the no-longer-Huge Slime. It's extremely agile at this point, but Yuel takes it out in a single hit. I guess bringing her with us was a good idea after all.

And the drop is run-of-the-mill Slime Jelly. We grind the boss fight five more times before we finally get a Slime Drop, at which point it's already past noon.

We head to the tavern after disbanding. Today's profit was around 20,000 Zeni per person. As expected for a hunt where healing magic or recovery potions are required, it's quite tasty.

...But, this isn't enough. It's a massive haul for the typical adventurer, but I'm nowhere near reaching my goal. A single rare drop may be worth 200,000 Zeni, but divided between 9 people that's barely over 22,000 each.

I might reach a million Zeni eventually if we repeat the boss fight enough, but I don't have time for that now. After today, I only have 5 days left to make a million Zeni. No, I need to save up even more than that.

I sit in my treatment stall at the tavern and think. Usually I'm watching the miniskirt waitress and wondering about the color of her panties, but I can't do something like that right now. I have to think up a method to earn money within the next 5 days.

"U-Umm, I heard that it was possible to receive treatment for deferred payment here, is that true?"

While I'm deeply immersed in thought, a woman's voice calls out to me. It seems she's missing part of her leg, and in its place there's a plain, wooden artificial limb.

Perhaps this is the injured adventurer acquaintance that Ruffian A mentioned earlier today? He must have gone and told her about me right away. I'd rather get the money now, but there's nothing I can do about it if she doesn't have any.

"That's right. Is that your only injury?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I was bested by a Giant Ant. I can use magic so I've managed

to get by, but I have no savings so I was unable to get it treated."

"Giant Ant, huh? It figures.'High Heal'"

High Heal is the spell between Heal and EX Heal. In Eight's case he was weakened due to blood loss so I used EX Heal on him, but for simply regrowing missing limbs, this is enough. Not even an excellent healer could cast this many times in a single day, since they'd run out of magic power.

"T-Thank you so much! Umm, will deferred payment really be acceptable? I know you said so, but I was certain I would be forced to pay with my body..."

Well, since it was that shady-looking adventurer's recommendation then it's no surprise she'd be worried. Now that I get a good look at this woman adventurer, she's got huge tits, and her face isn't bad either. There's a certain charm to the idea of having her pay with her body the way Ruruka does. If a basic Heal costs a breast massage, then I'm awfully excited to figure out the price for a High Heal... but Yuel is right around the corner.

Having her pay with her body, I can't behave like that.

"It's fine, I'm only doing what's natural."

Yuel looks at me with pure reverence for the treatment I do. I can't destroy her image of me.

Having her pay with her body, I can't behave like that.

"T-Thank you very much. I'm so glad to meet such a fine healer! I have no money right now, but I'll definitely pay you back before long!"

The female adventurer flashes me a delighted smile. My eyes wander south and spy a curvaceous, truly feminine body line.

Having her pay with her body, I can...

"Thank you so much!"

As she expresses her thanks, her huge breasts shake violently.

There shouldn't be any problem as long as Yuel doesn't find out, right?

No, I can't. I can't. It's our first meeting. It's too premature. And even if I let her pay with her body, how could I hide it from Yuel...?

–Eureka!

"That's right, of course, I could do that instead. I take it back! Please pay with your body after all!!"

"E-Ehhhhhh!?"

Chapter 22: Purchase

"P-P-P-Please, wait! I can't possibly do that! I-I had no no intention of paying with my b-body in the first place! High Heal is around 50,000 Zeni, is it not? I will surely repay that amount!"

Shaking her head vehemently, the adventurer clasps her giant tits to hide them. I guess that's an unsavory proposition for her after all. I gave her the wrong idea apparently.

"Ahh, no, that's not it! I didn't mean it like that..."

My Eureka moment wasn't about a way to legitimately fondle this adventurer's huge tits without Yuel finding out.

What I thought up was a way to buy Eris' hospital, in other words a way to make money. Adventurer-chan will indeed be using her body to pay me back for the treatment, but not in a sexual way. I was just thinking along those lines right before, so it unconsciously came out in a misleading way.

"M-Master! In that case, in that case I will...!"

Apparently Yuel misunderstood me too.

Sitting across from me, Yuel is squeezing my hands and gazing up into my eyes. ...She's blushing out of embarrassment and restlessly rubbing her thighs together.

What could she possibly think I'm planning to do?

I don't want to think about it.

I notice a few people nearby glancing over this way. Saying something like that in the tavern, and with such a loud voice, seems to have grabbed their attention. These looks are...

My resounding solicitation for her to pay with her body after giving her medical treatment. This poor Adventurer-chan clutching her breasts and glaring at me. And young Yuel's bashful attitude.

...Yep, these are definitely looks of disdain.

Oh crap.

"N-No! That was a figure of speech... I-I didn't mean it like that! It's just, rather than paying me with money, I'd like for you to help me in the labyrinth! Right, you can pay me back in the labyrinth!"

"...You want me to... help in the labyrinth?"

In any case I emphasize "labyrinth". Since she's an adventurer, that should make my intentions clear. I peek at Adventurer-chan's face, and she seems convinced. At least I've cleared up the misunderstanding with her.

The glares from around the room have softened up too. They realize it was a misunderstanding. That was close. If a rumor got out that I demanded her body as payment for treatment, that would throw a wrench in my plans.

I turn back to Adventurer-chan. With those knockers back in my field of view, there's a rising urge to tell her "I want you to 'help' me with those giant tits!" but I suppress it and continue.

"Yeah, the truth is..."

"I-I'll, I'll help you with it! E-Even if we're in the labyrinth!"

...But apparently Yuel's still under the wrong impression.

Yuel says that with a desperate expression, half on the verge of tears. She's pleading with her eyes as she tugs on my shirt.

Just what exactly are you fine with doing, "even if we're in the labyrinth"?

Listening to this conversation, what exactly are people going to think I'll make adventurers do once we're in there?

It's probably not something I should think about. No, I don't want to think about it.

Well, I'd better clear up her misunderstanding.

"That's not it, Yuel. I can't even remotely imagine what you meant by that, but I'm sure that's not it."

Right, there's only one thing I want her to help with.

"The thing I want help with in the labyrinth is... Huge Slime subjugation."

And then, three days later.

"Alright everyone, I'm counting on you!"

""""YEAHHHHHHHHH!!""""

We're in the 7th floor's boss room. The adventurers are lined up in a row in front of the Huge Slime, holding shields. There are eight of them, mostly members of the Giant Ant Victims Club. Not that such a club actually exists.

This turnout is the result of asking Eight, Geyser, and other customers of my treatment stall to introduce me to "injured adventurers who can't afford treatment".

The adventurers I've asked to cooperate with me this time are mostly novices.

In this labyrinth, the drops on the 7th floor are quite juicy for the amount of effort involved. Slimes are about as weak as the Fang Rabbits from the first floor, but the magic stones they drop are 7th-floor-level. Accordingly, a lot of adventurers want to hunt on the 7th floor.

But to get here, they have to make it through the 6th floor. And the 6th floor is home to Giant Ants. The terrifying Giant Ants that can easily ambush you and bite off your leg, even if you're an experienced adventurer like Eight or running with all your might like me.

There are many inexperienced adventurers who, captivated by the promise of money, try to cross the 6th floor with insufficient ability. And then their legs become delicious treats for the Giant Ants.

However, having lost a leg, no small number of them are unable to continue working as adventurers.

A big hospital or a church would be able to heal them.

But even if they tried to borrow money, there's hardly any place that would lend money to a novice adventurer. It's not like adventuring is the only kind of physical labor available, but even if they can make enough to eke out a living, not many of them would be able to pay off their hospital bills promptly.

And that's why, by seeking out adventurers like that over the past three days, I've finally put together a force capable of taking on the Huge Slime. The ones

who've joined are mostly novice adventurers without much skill. It's not like everyone's ability is particularly high. If anything it's low. But that's not a problem. All I'm asking of them is to be a meat wall.

The scheme to get rich quick by hunting the Huge Slime has a bottleneck.

Huge Slime's rare drop sells for the considerable sum of 200,000 Zeni. But to safely defeat the Huge Slime, quite a few people are necessary to make a meat wall capable of reliably stopping its massive body. And with every extra party member, each member's share of the profits is reduced.

—That's why I called upon these broke adventurers and offered to heal their injuries for free in exchange for spending a day hunting the boss with me.

I wouldn't make it in time for the hospital auction if I accepted deferred payment for healing these penniless adventurers. So I'm having them pay me back right away using their physical bodies.

The adventurers, who have no way of saving up enough money to pay for treatment, will be happy just to have their problem resolved in a single day's work. And I'll be happy getting to monopolize all of the Huge Slime's drops. It's a win-win relationship.

The Huge Slime collides with the adventurers, making a huge thud.

Since there are so many tanks, there's a bigger burden on the ones in the middle, and there will inevitably be injuries. The line will probably collapse if they take another hit in this condition.

"Area Heal!"

But as long as I'm here, I can put them right back into shape. As many times as it takes. And the pain only lasts a moment.

""""Fireball!""""

Plus, I was able to secure three wizards. After every collision, the defenseless Huge Slime gets blown apart by three spells.

Our clear time is much faster than when I came here with Geyser's group. At this rate, I should be able to earn over a million Zeni over the course of a day.

Moreover, it's pure profit. The Giant Ant Victims Club may no longer have any

members, but it might be worth doing this again after some time has passed.

While I'm thinking it over, Yuel finishes off the diminished Huge Slime.

"Master! It's a Slime Drop!"

I tenderly pet Yuel's head when she runs over, and deposit the Slime Drop in my item box. First one down.

After that, we continue the Huge Slime hunt for an entire day.

Once I sell the drops, we return to the inn. The amount of money I have at my disposal now is 1,600,000 Zeni. Typically, it would be divided up between all the party members and further reduced by the cost of expensive potions, but there's none of that this time. As a result, this huge pile of money is entirely mine.

And then, the next day, the hospital auction concludes.

I've placed the winning bid on Eris' hospital.

Chapter 23: Eris' Hospital

I'm in front of the door to Eris' room.

I managed to place the winning bid on Eris' hospital for 1,500,000 Zeni, which was nearly everything I had. That being said, it was considerably lower than the market value. Eris' hospital was originally the home of Eris' family of four, so it's a rather large house. If the location weren't so bad, I probably wouldn't have been able to afford it.

But now I hold the deed for that very hospital in my hands.

The deed is currently under my name, but I plan to transfer it back over to Eris as soon as I can. It's not like there would be any problem with leaving it like this, but if Eris' hospital became no-longer-Eris' hospital it would leave a bitter aftertaste in my mouth.

While I'm mulling it over, I knock softly on the cheap, splintered wooden door.

But there's no response. Is she not there?

I try knocking again. Still no response.

Apparently Eris is out. Well, it's not like I'm dying to tell her that I bought the hospital right away or anything. I'll wait patiently.

As I'm waiting in the inn room for Eris to return, I notice that Yuel has fallen asleep. Spending all day yesterday hunting the boss must have really tuckered her out. She's sleeping soundly, taking soft breaths. She probably won't wake up for a while.

I have a sudden thought.

How is Eris going to react when she sees the hospital deed?

Eris was living in that hospital for many years. It must hold a ton of family memories for her. And she probably wanted to wait for her sister's return in that house. From Eris' perspective, it must have been something she really didn't want to let go of.

And that's where I gallantly swoop in, holding the title deed.

I'll hand her the deed without asking for anything in return. She'll be so moved, of course. Hell, maybe she'll be so impressed that she goes all "my hero, take me!" on me.

The problem is what comes after that. If by some chance Eris and Yuel start to bicker over me, things could get bloody. Up until now I've just been absent-mindedly thinking "I wanna make a harem", but if I actually try to do it I bet that some difficulties will arise. If I hook up with Eris then Yuel will cry, but if I hook up with Yuel then Eris will hand me over to the authorities. Nah, since she's a slave and all it probably doesn't work like that in this world.

As these thoughts are running through my head, I hear footsteps coming up the stairs from the hallway. I stick my head out the doorway to find Eris just about to enter her room next door.

"...What do you want?"

When Eris spots me come out into the hallway she calls out in a low, tired voice. There's almost no light in her eyes. She looks exhausted.

And she seems pretty moody. Is it her time of the month?

Nah, that's probably not it.

Her outfit is the habit she used to wear at her hospital. I bet she's been going around to other hospitals trying to find a job.

"Have you figured out where you're going to work yet?"

"...Not yet, but I'm fine. I'll work it out soon. Besides, today... the hospital was sold, so I have a bit of savings now."

Her attitude is curt. I bet she hates making other people worry. She's the kind of person who wants to solve her problems on her own. Living by herself from a young age probably gave her a strong sense of independence.

Be that as it may, she hasn't found a new workplace yet after all. Since I bought back her hospital, that works out better for me. But I had a feeling that's how it would turn out.

Eris' abilities as a healer aren't especially amazing, but she does have an

average level of skill. Besides, she's a blonde bombshell with magnificently ripe melons. I'm sure she could get hired just about anywhere, but... other hospitals don't think very highly of her.

Because Eris set her hospital's treatment fees a lot lower than market price.

It's not like this city has a union that establishes uniform treatment costs or anything, but there's a general market price of 400 Zeni per Heal. The fact that Eris attracted customers by slashing that price in half likely didn't sit well with the nearby hospitals.

For her hospital to go bankrupt while operating like that, and then for her as the manager to come around looking for a job, they all probably either told her she got what she deserved, or approached her with obvious ulterior motives. I'd be fully in the second camp by the way.

But once Eris sees the deed I'm holding, her haggard face should perk right up.

She's built up a lot of fatigue from not being able to find a job. Maybe the other hospitals said some awful things to her, and it's wearing down her emotions. If I show her this deed at a time like that...

Something like "Y-You bought back the hospital for me! So dreamy, take me!" is sure to happen. Eris will start calling me "dear", maybe even with a heart attached to it.

"...So what is it you want?"

Eris' worn-out face is giving me a look that says, "state your business already". In front of those tired eyes, I dangle the hospital deed.

"Eris, take a look at this."

"...What is this? Some official document?"

Eris makes a suspicious face, but she takes a look at the deed. Then her expression turns to shock.

"W-Why do you have this!? Even though today... it was sold off..."

Eris keeps reading the deed over and over in astonishment.

"Yeah, I bought it."

Once Eris realizes what I'm saying—

"You did...? B-But... how... that much money...!"

—I wait for her to come leaping into my arms... but nothing happens.

"But... but you... three months ago you... weren't you broke!?"

H-Huh? That's not quite the reaction I was expecting.

Far from rejoicing, it's more like her whole body is shaking out of frustration. She's choking back her trembling voice and clenching her clothes with her head hung low.

What's with this reaction? That hospital deed that was so important to her is right here, isn't it? So why—

"I'm sorry, I, I can't deal with this right now..."

Then Eris disappears into her room as if to run away, with tears trickling down her cheeks.

What just happened? Does Eris hate me so much that even the hospital doesn't make up for it? Since her hospital ended up in the hands of a man like me—

...Nah, probably not. More likely it's because she couldn't hang on to the hospital no matter how hard she tried, and then I bought it like it was no big deal. It was so important to Eris that she was willing to incur the ire of the surrounding hospitals by lowering her prices, just to protect it. I easily acquired the hospital that she desperately tried and failed to protect. That must be why she seemed so frustrated.

No doubt Eris just needs some time to sort out her feelings right now.

Yuel is sleeping softly on the bed in the room. I ought to give Eris more time before trying to talk to her again... but without someone to talk to, there's nothing for me to do.

Wait, that reminds me, my item box is getting full. During yesterday's Huge Slime farming, along with the rare drops, I also got a huge amount of Slime Jelly.

Adding in the amount I had already saved up, there's easily enough to last me a year.

I could spend some money at the adventurer's guild to expand the size of my item box, but since I just bought the hospital I don't have much money left. Alright, I'll organize my item box.

As I dig through my item box, more and more trash comes out. Street food skewers, fruit cores, a gravure photo taken by a magical projection tool... that last one's not trash. A frayed toothbrush made from some sort of animal hair that I never got around to tossing out, a chipped wooden cup...

And... a bloodstained, tattered habit.

It's the one from that time I went into the labyrinth to search for Yuel. I kept thinking about throwing it out, but it always slipped my mind.

Before I forget again, I should hand it over to the inn's poster girl and have her throw it out with the rest of the trash.

Then, as I leave the room with the habit in my hands—

"Sorry about earlier, I...!?"

—I bump into Eris in the hallway.

She's staring at my arm... no, at the bloody, ripped habit. Her expression shifts back and forth between surprise and sadness a few times while she looks at me.

"Hey, is t-that..."

Eris covers her mouth with shaking hands, and gawks at my habit in shock. The very same habit that I was wearing when I went to look for Yuel.

"Don't tell me... for me? Did you really go looking for an expensive magic item in the labyrinth for my sake, and because of that...?"

...H-Huh?

Looks like Eris is jumping to conclusions.

"No, this is..."

...Actually, wait.

Eris definitely thinks that I recklessly risked my life to scour the depths of the labyrinth for the sake of her hospital, or something along those lines.

Maybe I shouldn't go out of my way to correct her misunderstanding.

As far as I can tell, now that Eris thinks I bet my life to earn the money to pay for her hospital, it feels like her mood is much better than before. And she'd likely be more willing to accept that I bought her hospital if the story was that I risked life and limb for it.

"Sorry, I... must have made a mistake. But how, how did it get like that...?"

Eris strokes the bloodstained habit as her eyes start to water. I can clearly feel the compassion in her tender gesture.

This is my chance.

For Eris' sake, I risked my life to earn enough money, and bought back her hospital. Why don't I go with that? ...It makes me look cooler that way too.

Besides, it will improve Eris' mood. Right, this is for Eris' sake as well.

So I smile at Eris and casually explain.

"Of course, I had to pay you back for the kindness you showed me, right?"

Upon hearing that, an expression floats up on Eris' face that's somehow simultaneously happy and sad.

"...You dummy, going that far. Besides, a hospital isn't something worth risking your life over."

I totally agree. I would never risk my life for the sake of a building.

Eris is still looking at me with that sad-yet-happy expression. I take the opportunity to retrieve the deed from my item box and—

"Eris, I want to set things right with you. Back then, even though it bothered you, I just thoughtlessly did whatever I wanted. And I didn't see any problem with it. But that's not how it felt for you. I'm sorry for not realizing it. I was in the wrong. But I'd like to atone for that by returning the goodwill you showed me. So... won't you accept this?"

I kneel down at Eris' feet as I speak.

I must look like such a stud right now. Risking my life to raise the money to purchase my benefactor's hospital, and then returning it to her with no strings attached.

What a moving story.

I feel like I pulled it off flawlessly.

"...! I'm so sorry, I even kicked you out, and yet you still..."

Eris takes my hand that's holding the title deed and softly wraps both of hers around it. A single tear spills down her cheek.

"I don't blame you for that."

Since it was clearly my fault for sexually harassing you.

But we have a tender mood going right now. I shouldn't mention something so vulgar. I'll gently use my finger to wipe away her tear.

"When you showed up, it felt almost like my father had come back. Your healing magic skill that could make up for the deficit, and how you would show kindness in one way or another. It felt almost nostalgic, somehow. But you know, that's exactly why I hated the sexual harassment so much. That was wrong though, you're not my father. You're your own person..."

Sexual harassment is bad even if I'm not your father you know. But Eris is completely caught up in the atmosphere.

It's a good mood.

"But don't ever do something that dangerous again. Look, the debt is gone, so I'm sure we can live off of the hospital alone. Why don't you stop being an adventurer, okay?"

It's a good mood, and yet.

And yet... I'm feeling a little guilty.

The way this is headed should be the best outcome for both Eris and myself. But my chest feels like it's getting jabbed by needles. Yet it's for Eris' sake that I'm letting this misunderstanding continue.

Even so, I shouldn't earn her favor by taking advantage of the situation. I feel

guiltier and guiltier every time she says something nice to me.

Yeah, even if it's this late, I should tell her that it's a misunderst—

"It was too embarrassing, so I never told you this, but you saved me just as much as I saved you. It was lonely running the hospital all by myself. and business was terrible. When you showed up at a time like that, I was sure that together we could get the hospital back on its feet."

—While I'm still processing that, Eris continues talking.

And, in a voice that's barely a whisper, Eris mutters.

"...Thank you."

Then she lets her head thump onto my chest.

Since she's bending forward, I can feel her bountiful breasts. Along with her softly fluttering blonde hair. A sweet scent tickles my nose.

...I decide to take this lie to the grave.

Afterwards, we head to the property broker near the center of town. For now, I left Yuel a note saying that I went out with Eris.

There are no issues with the title transfer, and it's finished in an unexpectedly short time. Then, as we stroll down the main street on our way back, I try casually putting my arm around Eris' waist.

"!... Honestly..."

Eris flinches and throws a questioning glance at me. But, she doesn't resist. She has an attitude like "I suppose it can't be helped".

...I think I'll have Yuel go work a shift at the tavern tonight.

Eris' opinion of me has seemingly skyrocketed. If it was before, she'd slap my hand away from her waist and scowl at me.

We continue walking like that, and as we pass in front of the tavern—

"Yo, Shiki! Your farmin' with the 'venturers really paid off, huh! Come buy us a round!"

"What's with the gal on your arm? Whatta hottie. ...Hoho, I get it, you went

right to a brothel as soon as you got some money huh? Way to go, Shiki!"

We run into Eight and Geyser, whose faces are flushed bright red from drunkenness.

Uh oh. This development is not good.

"You comin' with us next time? Just havin' you there is crazy profitable! Whaaat, s'fine if you hang back like last time n' jusss heal! Let us take care of stoppin' the attacks, it's allll goood!"

"Yeah, leave the fighting to us! Hahahahaha!"

"H-Hang on! Let's talk about it later! Now's not a good time!"

Not good. What's not good, you ask? The fact that Eris-san is right here. I look to my side...

"Why might it not be a good time, I wonder?"

And Eris is glaring at me with eyes sharp enough to shoot me to death.

...I really didn't think this through.

I confess. I confess everything.

About how the bloodstained habit had nothing to do with earning money for the hospital. About how I just decided to go along with Eris' misunderstanding. And that I mainly did it to improve Eris' image of me.

"I-I'm sorry..."

I prostrate myself. Without a doubt, it's a perfect-form [dogeza](#). With my head against the pavement stones of the main street, I beg for nothing but her forgiveness.

Eight and Geyser, perhaps sensing the turbulent atmosphere, flee the scene.

"Hahhh, you really know how to spoil things.It's fine. You don't really need to apologize."

She must just be fed up with me at this point. I want nothing to do with you anymore, so don't bother, that kind of feeling.

I timidly raise my head... and there is Eris's outstretched hand.

"Seeing me in that state, you were worried about me, right? ...I get it, okay."

I take Eris' hand and rise as she gives me a smile. The feel of her soft hand somehow makes me very happy.

"It doesn't really matter how you did it. The fact is, you raised a huge amount of money to buy the hospital for me. Right?"

Then Eris mutters "But lying is bad, got it?" while giggling.

"Look, now your knees are all dirty."

"Y-Yeah."

I brush the dust off my knees and look at Eris. Framed by the sun, her smile has an all-enveloping tender feel to it. It reminds me of the days when I used to work at her hospital.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, I speak while trying my best to stay calm.

"Shall we go back?"

And Eris replies—

"Yes, let's go back. To the inn where Yuel-chan is waiting. Then we can all go home to our hospital."

She says with a smile.

Vol.1 LN Side Story: The First Errand

"I want you to make dinner today."

It's been a week since I came to this world and started working at Eris' hospital.

Out of nowhere, Eris brings that up.

Eris is great at cooking. It's on the level where if hers was mixed in with the food from a restaurant, you couldn't tell the difference.

And for this whole week, Eris has always done the cooking.

Despite that, now she wants me to make the food all of a sudden. What the heck is up with that?

"Me, cook?"

"Yes, I have always been making it, but look, the magic tool we have here isn't the type that uses magic stones as fuel. The more common type operates by the user pouring in their own mana, you know? And there were quite a few customers today, so I don't have enough mana to spare."

I see, so that's how it is?

In this house's kitchen, magic tools are used to provide the heat. This one's like a gas burner that runs on mana.

To use it, the user needs to constantly pour in their mana to keep the flame going.

Since I seem to have more mana than others it's no big deal for me, but apparently it becomes a burden for Eris. Why is she using something like that, you ask? Because buying magic stone fuel is supposedly wasteful.

And yet, maybe this is a chance for me.

I definitely can't beat Eris when it comes to cooking skill, but I have an advantage in the form of my knowledge of Japanese cuisine. If this goes well and I get a tight grip on Eris' stomach, there may even be a development such as "I can't live without your cooking anymore, marry me!".

"I see, I see, in that case there's no helping it. Well then, just leave it to me!"

Eris gives me a bank card containing the budget for dinner, then I head out into the streets in high spirits to buy ingredients.

She told me I didn't have to do the shopping too, but in order to make Eris' taste buds sing, I'll have to carefully select the finest ingredients.

And yet this is the first time I'm buying ingredients since I came to this world. I wonder just what kind of ingredients there are? It'd be great if there's soy sauce or miso.

I ponder such things while I walk down the road Eris told me to use, and eventually I arrive at the market.

Powerful voices are flying about, and there are tons of people. Seems like it's thriving.

Keeping in mind that I want to buy meat or fish first for the main dish, I head towards a place where there appear to be many such carts.

"Welcome, welcome! Shopping for dinner, Onii-san? Ours is fresh and cheap, how about a piece!"

A voice immediately calls out to me. When I turn in its direction, there are numerous hunks of some unknown meat set out on a cart. Looks like it's a butcher.

"Ooh, whatcha selling?"

"It's Orc."

...Did I mishear that?

"Did you just say Orc?"

"Yeah, it's Orc, Orc meat! Those green-skinned, pig-faced guys. Their thick, fatty meat is delicious! C'mon, why don't you buy a piece!"

"I-I'll pass..."

I lose my enthusiasm all at once. The heck is Orc meat. Is it similar to pork?

I've come to understand the common sense of this world little by little through my conversations with Eris over this past week.

Orcs are a type of monster. It's that Orc, the one that appears in fantasy-type games. Can you even eat them? I can't believe it.

I try looking out over my surroundings once again, and there are lots of ingredients I don't recognize. It's not like they're all ingredients I haven't seen before, but about half of them are new to me.

The culinary culture of this world seems quite different from Japan's. Now that I think about it, the taste of soy sauce or miso didn't come out in a single one of Eris' dishes.

...Perhaps making Japanese cuisine is going to be difficult.

"Hey, you cool Onii-san over there! How about some eggs? Large or small, we got 'em all!"

I look around the market a little after that, when a voice calls out to me again.

I turn around to find not eggs, but peaches. That's right, peaches. Wrapped in cloth, gently packed, perfectly ripe peaches.

The woman who called out to me has wide-open cleavage, and on top of that she's pressing in with her arms as if to emphasize it.

Can't we just get takeout?

...No no, this isn't the time to get distracted by such things.

Shopping, I came here to shop. I should leave.

This egg-seller Onee-san's smile reeks of suspicion. If I try to haggle with this sort of woman, I will undoubtedly lose. I couldn't even win against the redheaded adventurer who came to the hospital yesterday.

I can predict how things are going to develop from here on out. No doubt about it, I'll be ripped off.

I should leave immediately.

"W-Wait a second, Onii-san! These eggs, they're just a little high-priced, but that's because they're really yummy! L-Look! If you buy a dozen right now, I'll throw in a special favor!"

When I try to leave, she calls out to me from the side. Man, it's no good, I

mustn't listen.

"Onii-san! Wait, please wait. Please don't walk away. Look, I'll do something wonderful."

S-Something wonderful!?

...N-No, no, no good, it's no good.

My bank card currently holds the precious dinner funds entrusted to me by Eris. I can't afford to frivol them away.

But, but... maybe just looking would be okay. It's not like I have to use the money she entrusted me with, so long as I'm only looking...

When I glance over, the Onee-san grins.

And, in the valley between her breasts, sunken deep, deep into her soft flesh, there's an egg wedged in there. W-What a violent spectacle.

Once my eyes are pointed at that egg, as if to make doubly sure, she implores me with upturned eyes.

"Won't you harvest my eggs?"

I ended up buying them. I ended up harvesting them. Almost all of the money in my possession has been converted to eggs. Two heaping omelettes are lined up on the table at Eris' hospital, and she's gazing at them with a delicate expression.

"Hey, why is it just omelettes?"

"I-I'm sorry."

There's no way I can answer that. If I tell her I got hustled into buying expensive eggs by some Onee-san's seduction, I'll unmistakably be scorned.

Even if I don't get fired, she'll be resistant to living together.

As I'm hemming and hawing while I agonize over it, Eris seems to come to a conclusion on her own.

"I see... there's an orphanage close to that market, isn't there. In any case, the children were trying their best to sell eggs, so you ended up buying them against your better judgment, am I right?"

That's wrong. I don't know how it would have gone if that situation did come up, but emotions aside, what got me carried away this time was my sexual desire.

However, I can't explain the details to Eris, so I can't deny what she said either.

As I'm prevaricating with an ambiguous expression like that, Eris starts to reach for her omelette as if the conversation is over.

"You aren't going to eat?"

"Ah, no, I'll eat."

The two of us attempt to level our omelette mountains. I feel a little guilty, but this is quiet time.

I mull it over as I eat my omelette, which certainly can't be called delicious.

In one way or another, this hospital feels comfortable. It's probably thanks to Eris' personality.

I'm a weak-willed, useless guy, though.

But one day I'll return the favor to Eris.